

## **Haldimand County Mayor Endorses OPP Costs being removed from Local Tax Levy**

Haldimand County's Mayor Ken Hewitt thinks the province should pay for the cost of the OPP. That was one of the messages that came from the mayor at his monthly meeting with the press on October 26. Hewitt said it makes sense to see the OPP budget taken off the county's tax levy and put on the province since the province governs the OPP.

He also said the police contract is "one size fits all" and not catered to the different municipalities. Essentially, the money would still be coming from the same taxpayers, but Hewitt's idea suggests the burden of paying for policing in the county should be spread out among all taxpayers in the province instead of just Haldimand taxpayers.

Hewitt added that it would also make it easier for individual officers to keep track of their hours on county duty and provincial duty. "We all have provincial highways running through communities so every time [the OPP are] on the highways, the officer has to remember that that period of time, he's quoted provincial billing," said Hewitt. "If you get a speeding ticket on Highway 6, the cost of that is being billed to the province. There's a lot of time there [and] who knows if that's actually done or not."

Along with that, issues related to Douglas Creek Estates that requires the OPP's time are also billed to the province. "Rather than confuse and create more opportunities for errors, simplicity would be just to have one bill and the province of Ontario, all of the people in Ontario, share in the cost of policing across the board."

He said unless the contract is catered to each municipality, the way it is structured right now puts some municipalities at a disadvantage especially when the contract comes up for renewal in 2014. The province is trying to create equality among Ontario police officers by essentially making the cost of policing the same across the province. Instead, Hewitt said the cost of policing should be more in line with the cost of living.

"For us, just to keep the same marginal level of service, we're looking at a one per cent increase on the levy to absorb what looks to be about an eight per cent increase in [OPP] salaries."

After last month's meeting with the contract officers, Hewitt believes the county is heading in a better direction. "Between Karen [General] and staff and the questions that I'm asking, we're not exactly where we need to be, but we are getting there."

The mayor also acknowledges that it's a struggle for the contract guys to bring a business point of view to the contract. "It's a challenge for the OPP to come in and say, 'Here's the contract. It's the same contract that's in Kingston. It's the same contract that's in London and it's applying to Haldimand.' It just doesn't work that way," he said. "There are needs in Haldimand that are completely different. We're trying to use the tools that we have to be able to demonstrate that this cookie-cutter contracting isn't working. We need to find a better way."