

Bancroft OPP costs jump by 20 per cent

By Bill Kilpatrick

Bancroft is among a growing number of municipalities that are seeing their OPP billing statements rise by double digit percentages. At the Oct. 23 meeting of council, staff presented the 2025 OPP billing statement which will see policing costs rise to \$1,691,410 for 2025. "We always have increases to our police costs," explained Andra Kauffeldt, general manager for the Town of Bancroft, "even when we do the things that they suggest for us to do to reduce our billing costs." Kauffeldt then explained how the OPP charges are calculated on a five-year rolling basis averaged over those years. She added that the costs per municipality are broken down into a base rate that every municipal household pays, which makes up 60 per cent of the costs and then calls for service make up the remaining 40 per cent. The costs, said Kauffeldt, can vary depending on the types of calls for service, "They [the OPP] assign a cost for the type of call you have. A robbery or a suspicious person, would have relatively small dollars attached to them, "whereas murder investigations or missing child lost and found rescues will have much higher per incident costs." Regarding the recent cost increase Kauffeldt provided some context stating that, "in 2023 our police costs were \$1,347,965, in 2024 they were \$1,393,000, and the OPP billing statement for 2025 pegs our costs at \$1,691,410, an increase of \$248,410. Which equates to roughly 4.5 per cent tax rate increase just to pay for the OPP costs." "This is not an unusual increase," said Kauffeldt, "municipalities across the province are seeing double digit increases resulting in two, three, four, five, and I've seen as high as eight per cent tax increases on their levies to pay those additional costs." While Kauffeldt states that this is not an "unusual increase" many municipalities don't see it that way and are being surprised and caught off-guard by the increases. A Global News article pointed out that municipal councillors in places like Napanee and Collingwood were "astonished" and "disheartened" by the sudden increase. According to the article, Collingwood Mayor Yvonne Hamlin said that she was, "shocked and disgusted" by the increase adding that, "This is a terrible thing we're going to have to deal with." The article stated that Napanee will have to raise taxes six per cent to cover the extra costs and Collingwood will have to raise their taxes by seven per cent. The increased OPP costs, according to the article, are a result of a new contract that was signed this past summer. The new contract will see salary increases of 4.75 per cent retroactive to the first year of the deal, 4.5 per cent for the second year and 2.75 per cent for the remaining two years. The Global News article quoted OPP spokesperson Gosia Puzio who said that "salary and benefits make up 90 per cent of municipal police costs," adding that another factor that is impacting the increases is that the OPP has returned to "pre-pandemic work loads." According to Mayor Jenkins, Bancroft's policing costs have only started to rise. They will be going up yet again due to the number of new officers that have been assigned to the Bancroft detachment. "Something I'd like to add," said Jenkins, "if we want to look down the road. There's been an increase in the size of our detachment, personnel wise, and those numbers have not hit us yet. They will start to hit us as we move forward starting next year." Kauffeldt added that, "All those new officers will start to appear on the 2024 rolling tally, which will hit us in 2026." Not only will there be extra costs associated with the extra number of officers, but there are more costs associated with the new OPP detachment board structure that took effect on April 1 this year. When asked what the board does deputy mayor Charles Mullett explained that, "We run the OPP detachment, except for enforcement," adding that the board also has the power to hire the detachment commander. "It's mandatory," stated Mullett who further pointed out that, "there's also two public people appointed by the board and two people appointed by the government, "who must get paid no less than \$150 for the meetings." Mullett said that the board decided to evenly split the costs, that amounted to just under \$8,000 this year, but that will change in 2025, "The budget for next year will certainly be higher than \$8,000," said Mullett adding that the Town's portion will also likely be higher, "as the board would like to change to a per household model [for billing]." The talk around the council table turned to ways that the town could save money on OPP costs and one of the issues that was raised by Councillor Tracy McGibbon was that the town should not be responsible for paying for calls for service of people who do not live in the catchment area. She suggested instead that those calls for service should be billed back to the offenders OPP detachment. Mayor Jenkins said that they have raised this issue with the government in the past, but nothing has changed thus far. Jenkins said that the town has also had delegations with provincial ministers asking for an increase in the Ontario Municipal Partnership Fund to help offset rising OPP costs, "We've probably met with ministerial staff six times" and the result of that is we've seen our Ontario Municipal Partnership Fund go up even less than our neighbours. Our lobby efforts are not working that well," Jenkins concluded. While the consensus around the table was that everyone agreed that they are happy with the level of OPP service they receive, they also agreed that the costs are becoming increasingly difficult to keep up with.