

Council offered suggestions to change procedures

By Jim Eadie

Wollaston Township council heard a brief delegation by a local citizen at their Aug. 8 regular meeting offering suggestions for changes to their procedural bylaw governing the conduct of their meetings. Roxanne Lambert asked council to consider several changes which would improve transparency, accountability, and increase public input. She suggested not limiting delegations to three per meeting and reducing their speaking time to five minutes plus council's questions.

"Currently, there is 15 minutes at the end of the meeting," said Lambert. "People can only make comment on an agenda item already decided." Lambert suggested the meeting agenda be available earlier, and the time to register a delegation with the clerk be extended until the day before the meeting being held. Currently the agenda and information is posted on the Friday afternoon prior to a Tuesday meeting. Citizens would have a better opportunity to review the meeting agenda, and arrange to speak on an agenda item before council makes a decision.

"There is more time to review materials," she said. "I don't think councillors want to spend their weekend studying and preparing for the meeting."

Wollaston Township clerk Jennifer Cohen noted there may have to be a distinction made between a delegation, and a presentation to council, which would occupy more than five minutes. For example, the auditor's report, or a local service agency presentation. Council had decided at a previous meeting to advertise the currently vacant public area manager position as a temporary contract until the end of the year. This person takes care of public areas such as the beach, park, pavilion and ice rink, community centre, gardens, and in addition works as a landfill attendant. Clerical staff have been covering off some of the duties by working extra hours. Four applicants were interviewed, but due to a council request to discuss the matter again, a candidate selection is on hold. Councillor Michael Fuerth is in favour of filling the position on a temporary basis, and then taking the time to look at all of the other options. "We have time to decide what to do in 2018," he said, "Offer the job to someone. We need to investigate possibilities. Yes ? we need to hire an employee ? but maybe not at 35 hours a week."

Councillor Dave Naulls is in favour of hiring a full-time township employee immediately. "At this point it seems to make more sense," he said. "I would like to see a full-time person who could be an ambassador for the township. For a municipality of this size, I see it as a false economy going with a contractor. Replace him ? and move on."

"It would be far more beneficial to the township to have an employee," said Reeve Graham Blair. "An employee would more effectively serve this township than a contractor. Researching and drafting contracts, in my mind, is kinda a waste of staff time and money. Saving money ? by giving up what? This is such a small piece of the pie, what little we save is lost in a loyal employee."

Councillor Bob Ireland agreed with Blair.

"If we can contract this out and it is cheaper ? then we have to look at savings for the taxpayers," said Councillor Lynn Kruger. "We should investigate it. Go on facts, and not just assumptions."

Fuerth noted that consultant Stephen Fournier is hired by the township to look at staff and administration efficiencies later this fall, and that could include this position, before making it permanent.

Council voted three to two in a recorded vote in favour of a motion to re-post the position due to the change in description, and hire a full-time employee as public area manager immediately. Councillors Fuerth and Kruger dissented.