

Possible changes to Wollaston fire services

by KRISTENA SCHUTT-MOORE

Staff

A delegation to Wollaston council was presented by JD Fentie, Wendy Mortimer and Frank McConnell, who brought forward concerns about the township's fire services, during the Monday, March 14 council meeting. Fentie said that fire services were an important part of the township's responsibilities and that they, "deserve careful responsibility and thought, and full community engagement."

He said that the ideas he was presenting were from across the Wollaston community and based on the fire services report that was recently published on the township website, www.wollaston.ca, and as well as a report that was prepared for the council in 2017. With the newest report suggesting to change the fire services commitment from exterior attack/non-extraction to interior attack/extractive, means that in the future the volunteer fire fighters could be expected to enter burning buildings. Fentie called this a significant change from what the volunteer fire fighters are expected to do today and deserves to be examined, "closely and publicly."

He asked that the community be suitably informed and he asked the council to commission a report that outlines the key benefits, costs and issues related to changing the fire services commitment. He also asked that the report include what impact the change would have on the volunteers, do they have the adequate training and if not how difficult would it be to get it? He went on to ask about the volunteer fire fighter's protective equipment and if what they have now is adequate for the new service and if they needed new equipment and/or vehicles. The big question was what was the cost of the new service? "Once this report is shared with the community, the council can then hold a town hall session to solicit further community involvement," continued Fentie.

"Council can then request a project plan for fire services in Wollaston that considers the findings of the 2017 report, the 2022 fire delivery report, community consultation and communication with other townships involved. This project plan should prioritize training, operating process and fire fighter equipment in the short and medium term, defining the requirements as well as establishing a timeline and budget for implementation. It should also establish a formal plan for refurbishment or replacement of the current fire hall in the medium to long term. Where possible, the approach should be to minimize capital expenditure and investigate leasing opportunities to reduce cost and take advantage of vacant space in Coe Hill." Fentie also asked that the council make public the current fire services plan and feedback from the current fire chief and relevant representatives from the other township's regarding fire services consolidation. He continued on saying that they were not saying one or the other service was better but that a clear and open consultation should take place based on a proper and technical view of the options. "Then once that is done a plan that includes scopes, schedule and costs can be developed and presented to the community as the foundation for the decision to proceed with a particular option." Council accepted Fentie's presentation, and moved to receive and file the report for further consultation later. Later in the meeting a motion was put forward for the chief building official to complete an external and internal evaluation of the physical condition of the Wollaston fire hall and report back to council. Both Mayor Kruger and Deputy Mayor Colton were against the motion. Mayor Kruger said that the township already has several reports and write ups that tell them the condition of their fire hall and she was not sure that they needed to include their chief building official when there were other things that he had to be doing at this time. Councillor Feurth said that the one report was done by a geologist not a structural engineer or anybody that knows anything about the building code like the chief building official does. "And when, I think, we have the insurance company having that building valued at over \$400,000 I don't think of it necessarily as a tear down."

Councillor Jeffery Swartmen agreed with Councillor Feurth about the chief building official looking at the fire hall, stating that the more information the township has the better, "especially if we are going to make another attempt at funding and stuff we need to show some urgency in how badly we need a new fire hall, or on the off chance as Councillor Feurth said, maybe that one can be repaired and/or added on to." A recorded vote was called for by Mayor Kruger. The vote came out as a tie with Mayor Kruger and Deputy Mayor Colton voting against it and Councillor Swartman and Councillor Feurth voting for it. Councillor Jay Morrison was

not in attendance so no vote was made by him. In an event of a tied vote, the mayor's vote is always used to break the tie. Since Mayor Kruger voted against the motion it was defeated and no inspection by the chief building official will be made. During the new business portion of the agenda, Councillor Swarman brought forward a motion for council to direct the clerk to release the report dated May 10, 2021 titled, standard estimate for a stand alone fire hall. He wanted it released to the public and updated, ?as it would show transparency to the public and have them involved in what is going on.? Councillor Swarman continued on to say that the report was given during a closed meeting, and he never supported that it should be in a closed session and that he thought it was something important that everyone needs to see. This also came to a tie with Mayor Kruger and Deputy Mayor Colton being against and Councillor Swarman and Councillor Feurth being in favour. No recorded vote was held but each member of council voiced their position. Mayor Kruger said that the report, ?was something that was brought forward to closed [meeting] and I don't believe that at this point that it's a document that we should be sharing.? Councillor Feurth asked for the reason it was in closed meeting and what section of the municipal act that reason was under. No one could answer that question. Councillor Swarman asked that the clerk bring back a report on why it was in closed meeting to the next meeting of council and deferred his motion to bring out the May 10, 2021 report until after the next meeting.