

South Algonquin votes against additional bylaw enforcement hours

By Michael Riley

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

South Algonquin Township council, at their regular meeting on Oct. 6, voted against a motion to add 20 extra hours a week to bylaw enforcement in their municipality as recommended by KPMG in their service delivery review submitted to council back in May. Those against it voted it was premature and needed further discussion, while those for the motion argued that these extra hours could address a whole host of bylaw issues within the township. Subsequently, council voted to defeat it by a margin of four votes to three votes.

The motion to hire a bylaw officer for an extra 20 hours per week arose from a service delivery review conducted by KPMG and delivered to council back in May. For over 150 years, KPMG has provided consulting, accounting, auditing, and tax services in Canada. KPMG's report identified the township's bylaw enforcement services as not expansive enough to deal with various infractions as they occur, especially during peak time periods like the summer. While bylaw enforcement services were provided two days a week, and based upon this report, staff suggested to council adding another 20 hours per week to this endeavor, and hiring an additional employee as bylaw officer to cover these extra hours, earmarked for evenings and weekends, especially during the summertime. The motion requested that council discuss the issue and approve adding these extra hours for bylaw enforcement in the township.

Mayor Jane Dumas introduced the motion brought forth by Councillor Bongo Bongo and Councillor Bill Rodnick and invited discussion on it. Councillor Joe Florent said that when discussions were had at committee level, a lot of the reason for doing this were to enforce trailers illegally on private property. However, there's nothing they can do about trailers on Crown Land, which he counted recently as being dozens of them within one kilometre of the shoreline of Bark Lake.

"This is a lot of money going out for something that I think essentially doesn't have any teeth. Personally, I think it's a waste of money to hire a bylaw enforcement officer in our township and the money could be better spent elsewhere," he says.

Florent also asked Dumas if they could have a recorded vote on this matter, to which she agreed.

Councillor Richard Shalla agreed that it was premature to do this and thought it should be delayed until they decided what they're going to do about trailers and whether to let dog infractions continue to be dealt with by the OPP.

"I just think there's some things to sort out before we start to spend that kind of money, taxpayer dollars. I appreciate the motion and the CAO for following through on KPMG's suggestions, and we've followed them before, but we don't have to always do so," he says.

Tracey Cannon, the planning and building administrator, commented about the bylaws they do enforce, saying there's a lot of issues with vehicles and fishermen parking illegally on roads and turnarounds.

"This is where a bylaw enforcement officer could address these issues. And as everyone's aware, there's lots of camping going on the ends of our turnarounds as well, with trailers set up so that could also be addressed with a bylaw enforcement officer," she says.

Councillor Sandra Collins suggested that 20 hours a week was too much, and perhaps they could start out with less hours.

"Maybe six to eight hours a week with that possibly being raised if we find there is a need. Would that be more suitable? It would be less impact on the budget for sure," she says.

Dumas asked Bryan Martin, the CAO/clerk-treasurer, for his input, as he, Cannon and other staff were much more aware of the issue regarding bylaws, non-adherence to them and enforcement within the township.

Martin acknowledged that less hours could be done with this if council decided that was best.

"We were just trying to position ourselves budget wise for adequate resources for bylaw enforcement should council require us to take a more proactive approach to the enforcement of bylaws that council has already enacted," he says.

Dumas confirmed with Martin that if the motion was defeated, it could not be brought back for consideration for a period of time, which he did. Rodnick suggested tabling the motion, which Dumas agreed with and took a vote from council on that suggestion. However, it was defeated with a no vote from Florent. That meant it had to be voted on that day as is.

Bongo spoke next, with regard to the trailers on Crown land brought up by Florent. He said they needed to lobby the provincial government as council that the Crown land within South Algonquin needed to be managed more proactively and better. Regarding the bylaw enforcement officer's additional hours, he was all for it.

"We have the KPMG report. Without a bylaw officer, what do the bylaws mean? Not a whole lot. They're practically meaningless," he says.

Bongo thought that Shalla's suggestion earlier to leave it up to signs and handouts to educate people into not breaking the bylaws was not adequate, as people sometimes don't read or obey these signs. He said he's had residents approach him furious, with him and council, that they're not doing more to enforce these bylaws.

"Even if we don't decide to regulate trailers, I'm sure we could fill a bylaw officer's 20 hours a week with other bylaw enforcement issues. If we delay, this won't be included in the budget for next year. I look forward to the vote, which I'll be voting in support of," he says.

Councillor Dave Harper asked when these extra 20 hours per week would be allocated, and Martin replied that they would go to off hours time periods; evenings and weekends.

Shalla again brought up that education should prevail over enforcement and fines.

"We have to work to solve the problem. So, if it means delaying this process so that we don't any embarrassing situations, so be it. My suggestion is we delay this, work with the MNR, have some discussion and debate, but we have a plan. How are we going to accommodate the people we want to come to our township and support our businesses and community. I'm sorry, but I can't buy this enforcement over education. It's not just about enforcement," he says.

Dumas said they could put that into any potential job description, that education would be the first approach over a ticket for an infraction.

"That's my feeling and that can be made clear in a job description," she says.

At that point, Dumas called the recorded vote. By a margin of four to three, the motion was defeated. Florent, Harper, Shalla and Rodnick voted no, while Dumas, Collins and Bongo voted yes.

Under the township council's procedural bylaw pertaining to Reconsideration, 12.15.1, the defeat of this motion to introduce more hours for bylaw enforcement means that it cannot be voted on again for another two years, which would be during the next mandate of council after the general election in 2022. With that no vote on this motion, council moved ahead with other business.