

What you don't know

To the Editor,

The garbage question in Hastings Highlands will not fly away on the wind of Mr. McPherson's words. Let's be clear: Most people know an out-going Council is bound by the "lame duck" proviso. That is: no major decisions or expenditures can be made at the last meeting of their term of office. A motion to cancel garbage service at that time would be against the law. It didn't happen.

Garbage service, a tenet of amalgamation, was a service that the resident majority have depended upon for the past 14 years. Though temporarily suspended due to expiry of the previous contract and no bids received from previous tenders, it was fully expected that the new council would restore the service.

Most municipalities employ contractors to supply garbage services in our area. Yet, for the past year our new council failed to find a single contractor to restore the service in HH.

Despite attempts by some members to restore some level of the service, there appears to be no collective will on this new council to continue garbage service.

Without a motion to cancel the service, in the final 2015 budget presentation the \$250,000 previously allocated for garbage service was missing - removed from the budget.

Thus, the garbage question remained in limbo throughout 2015.

Though police costs had risen, excess spending continued in other areas eg. the administration department budget ballooned by two thirds. As a result, ratepayers noted a 3.9 per cent increase on the 2015 tax bills. Thus, it seems an historic service, the desire of many, was overcome by the will of a few, to expend the tax dollars of the many - elsewhere.

In today's world garbage service is considered essential - not a luxury, especially with the increased number of retirees living here. The analogy from a minority of residents who don't have the service, don't need it, don't want it, and feel they shouldn't share the cost of it - is out of step with today's reality.

In our democracy, everyone shares the cost of health care, road maintenance/construction, social services, planning services etc., whether personally used or not. Garbage service is in the same realm of essential services we all pay for - witnessed by the majority of municipalities in Ontario who continue to provide this service.

The conundrum for HH ratepayers is: despite having earlier removed the garbage item, and the whole \$250,000 from the budget, council still entertained a presentation last fall from all three wards (with petitions signed by hundreds) to consider restoring some form of the service!

The outcome on Jan. 20, was the rather ambiguous motion by Roberts: "To end the discussion of curbside pick-up and move forward with municipal business." Well, the current state of our dump sites might be a good place to start. As other letter-writers have indicated our dump sites are a mess; access is limited, and the costs of conforming with health and safety standards, including access roads may grow into a major expense of "municipal business."

Thus, the cost of having no curbside pick-up could well be the main concern of our municipal business. Add to this a suggested tax increase of 4.8 per cent this year, and we can all agree with McPherson, "the numbers just don't make sense."

The decision on garbage takes the promise of amalgamation a major step backwards.

Has anyone called the Ombudsman yet?

Lorraine Fell