

# Ratepayers

## taking action against high assessments

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n after two South  
Residents armed

with over 130 letters complained that recent tax increases were not fair and services not equitable, especially in light of some property owners seeing increases of over 70% in the last four

years. Peter Lumb, speaking for a group of concerned landowners from the Red Bay area said that the time has come to do something.

"We consider we are not being treated in a fair manner both in the provision of services and in levying of funds to pay for these services," he said.

Using charts and figures he pointed out that according to his calculations, the revenue generated by Residential/Farm has increased from \$8.5 million to \$12.2 million in four years even though the tax rate was reduced by 10% by the town in 2004.

He stated that some individual taxes had increased by 50% in one year and many are in the 20% category. "Some of these are not waterfront or waterview and some have not increased although they are similar to those, which have increased."

Dorothy Sauter, a teacher at the Sauble School told council that at issue was the skyrocketing taxes based on higher assessments rather than the cost of services."

Quoting from a number of sources and groups who were battling high tax increases she asked: "Based on the information presented by Mr. Lumb and myself, does the Town agree that there are flaws in the MPAC system?"

(Since the province moved to MPAC - Municipal Property Assessment Corporation to provide the assessments there has been controversy, especially from people from waterfront residents and trailer park owners.)

that there is a more fair and equitable way to calculate taxes for the Town of South Bruce Peninsula?

### Some see increases of over 70% in taxes

While offering seven options for a more equitable tax system Lumb told council "you are taking our living expenses away from us with a 10% increase a year on the average. That doesn't seem to be a practical approach."

"The bottom line is, I am asking you to work for your constituents," Sauter told council.

Both Lumb and Sauter were critical of council for not lowering the tax rate enough to compensate for the higher assessment.

"Owing to the changes in tax rates and assessments in recent years, revenues have increased substantially. In 2004 the potential revenues would have been \$13.6m if the tax rate had not been cut by 10% to yield \$12.2m.

Council did not choose to reduce tax rates further, but even with the 10% cut, the increase in assessment enabled an increase in revenues from residents of \$1.4m over the 2003 figure of \$10.8m.

Lumb also asked why council needs to spend so much. "Are there other ways to operate more efficiently?"

Councillor John Close, who introduced the

options presented by Lumb questioned the extra increase council received over last year and suggested the town was "spending it on dinky toys. We are not giving it back to our taxpayers."

Councillors Pat Varley, Brian Fulford and Yvonne Harron were also sympathetic. "Something is wrong with the MPAC system" but that was something council had no control over. "But we could do more, said Varley."

"The system is not right," said Fulford.

Councillor Ja Kirkland was also upset and seemed surprised that council had received increased taxes this year over last.

"This council said we were going to have a 0% increase from 03 to 04."

Councillor Gwen Gilbert suggested that council needed to check every department closely to ensure fiscal responsibility.

Mayor Carl Noble pointed to unexpected expenses not included in the town's budget for a total of \$895,000. This included a \$403,000 net increase in OPP Policing, \$74,800 in Public Works and Maintenance, and an extra \$70,000 in Union and Non Union wages.

Last week, a seasonal resident with property at Red Bay said her taxes went from \$2,360 in 2002 to \$4,080 in 2003 for a 73% increase.

Living on a fixed income, she said the large increase presents "a real hardship."

She said that next summer she will rent a spot in the Warton park and live in a tent trailer for July and August so she can

### Tax meeting a success! submitted by Dorothy Sauter

On October 12, 2004, Peter Lumb and I spoke to the Town of South Bruce Peninsula on behalf of concerned residents of Red Bay and beyond about taxes, assessments and workable solutions to the huge increases many of us have recently faced. The Town listened. There are so many people to thank:

Peter, Laura, Wray, Carrie, Marie, David, Martha, John, Verna and Jim, the 60+ supporters at the meeting, the 200+ property owners who took the time to voice their concerns with letters and the numerous friends and neighbours who have helped out and continue to offer their support and assistance. I also wish to thank the Town for hearing us and agreeing to take our concerns to the next level. I am confident that together, we will reach a fair, equitable and swift solution. I will do my best to keep you informed.

In the meanwhile, I ask you to consider bringing the "relatively dormant" Red Bay Association back into full swing. I truly believe in the short term and in the long run, we could make a valuable contribution to our community and other communities as an organized group. On a personal note, I have enjoyed meeting and talking to many of you over the past few months and hope to have the opportunity again. This issue has brought us together. Let's build on the momentum. Over the winter months, please consider revitalizing the Association..... I wish everyone health, happiness and minimal snowdrifts)

- page of the 17-2004  
Fairness for Prop  
(2) Attempt a combination of two residential rates with improved services in some rural areas.  
(3) Find out whether the property assessment could be modified to an assessment of solely the buildings on a property. This could leave out the more volatile land value content and provide a route to tax allocation more closely linked to services provided.