

Muzzle appeal cost set at \$100 after lengthy debate

By MELANIE HENNESSEY

The Champion

It took four different motions and about an hour of debate, but Milton council managed to reach a compromise and approve a \$100 fee to appeal an interim muzzle order Monday night, down from the \$501 staff initially proposed.

The cost became a hot topic around town after the administration and planning committee endorsed eliminating the fee altogether at its January 17 meeting. Several councillors said they've had calls since then from many concerned citizens.

"It's pissing people off, quite frankly," said Ward 4 Councillor John Challinor, apologizing after to council and an offended resident for using unparliamentary language. He noted that he was contacted by six people on the issue.

A lengthy discussion and a standoff at the council table ensued, with two motions being defeated in a tie.

Mr. Challinor got the ball rolling, asking that the \$501 appeal cost be re-instated.

"There's a cost of doing business in this community — that's why we have an appeal cost," he said. "This is the fairest form of taxation."

But Ward 2 Councillor Mark Curtis argued \$501 was a steep fee and suggested bringing it down to \$100.

"It seemed like it was a high penalty for an appeal process," he said. "I think dog owners would find that (\$100) more reasonable."

Ward 3 Councillors Jan Mowbray and Cindy Lunau also spoke out against the fee, both labelling it "punitive."

Mr. Challinor then said he'd be willing to reduce the fee as a compromise, suggesting \$250.

"Too much time has been spent on this already," he said.

But Ms Mowbray said that's not much better than \$501.

"The problem of that is, what if it turns out on appeal that dog didn't bite the person?" she asked. "If they succeed in their appeal, then they should be given their money back."

Town Clerk Troy McHarg said there wouldn't be any refunds in that situation, noting the fee would cover staff and committee's

time, facility charges and staff overhead.

Council also heard from Milton resident Carolyn Caldwell, who pointed out the financial hardship the fee could cause some residents.

"This fee that is imposed on you, if you wish to go the appeal route, would mean to some families the choice between groceries for the next month or the \$501 appeal fee," she said.

"To someone who is well off, \$501 could be as insignificant as a lost nickel. Appeal fees will cause people to be very unequal, by means of their income."

A vote was called on the motion for a \$250 appeal fee, but it lost in a tie.

Ms Lunau then suggested council go with committee's recommendation to eliminate the charge, but that lost 7-3.

Wards 2 and 4 Councillor Ron Furik put the original \$501 recommendation back on the table, but that also lost on a split vote.

Finally, Mr. Curtis' \$100 suggestion was approved, with Mayor Gord Krantz, Mr. Challinor, Ward 2 Councillor Mike Boughton, Mr. Curtis and Ward 1 Councillors Rick Day and Brian Penman voting in favour and Mr. Furik, Ms Mowbray, Ms Lunau and Ward 4 Councillor Wendy Schau opposed. Wards 1 and 3 Councillor Barry Lee was absent.

While this wasn't the outcome Ms Caldwell was hoping for, she said it's something that will have to be accepted for now.

"Having it changed to \$100 is still a bitter pill to swallow," she said.

Interim muzzle orders were recently approved in the Town's animal control bylaw and can be issued to owners of dogs that have bitten or attacked a person or other domestic animal.

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