

Public a 'no show' at water and sewage meeting

BY ANDY COMBER

There was something missing from a public meeting concerning sewage and water rates held by the Town of Essex Jan. 8: the public.

No one showed up from the public to provide input to council on a proposed sanitary rate reduction or to acquire information on water and sewage rates in the town.

"I guess you don't want to see this again," said Treasurer Donna Hunter, referring to a prepared presentation outlining water and sanitary sewer rate increases shown to them in December.

Hunter said the rates, determined by a rate study in November 2005, are necessary to cover the cost of providing water and sewage systems in the municipality.

Sewage charge increases for Ward 1 Essex and Ward 4 Harrow will be softened in 2007 because of a dividend of \$152,000 paid to the town from E.L.K. Energy. However, Hunter

noted that it might be sometime before dividends are earned again.

Beginning January 1, 2007, water consumption rates will rise in all four of the town's wards to \$1.15 per cubic metre, a 21 percent increase over 2006 rates. The monthly base charge for water and sewage will both increase to \$15 from \$14.50.

With the reduction implemented, sanitary sewer consumption charges as a percentage of water consumption charges will be 113 percent for Ward 1 (Essex) and 128 percent for Ward 4 (Harrow).

Based on an average consumption of 25 cubic metres per month, the combined water and sewage rate in Ward 1 (Essex) in 2007 will be \$1,095 with the E.L.K. Energy reduction, an 8 percent increase over 2006 rates and a 40 percent increase over 2005 rates.

With the highest total, Ward 4 (Harrow) residents will pay a combined annual water and sewage rate of \$1,147 after the E.L.K.

Energy reduction. This total represents a three percent increase over 2006 rates and a 47 percent increase over 2005 rates.

With no E.L.K. reduction applied, combined water and sewage rates for Ward 3 (Colchester South) will increase 8 percent, adding up to an average cost of \$901.68 for the year.

With no sanitary sewers, Ward 2 (Colchester North) will only pay water charges, which would total \$525 annually, based on the 25 cubic metres per month usage, an increase of 14 percent.

Essex and Harrow's water and sanitary sewage rates are the highest of any surrounding community. Based on an average consumption of 25 cubic metres per month, combined annual water and sewage rates in 2006 amounted to \$1,113 in Harrow, \$1,017 in Essex, \$885 in Amherstburg, \$832 in Colchester, \$819 in Lakeshore, and \$650 in Kingsville.

Essex Council Notes

BY DANIEL SCHWAB

Family members of the late Colin Cameron sought an explanation from Essex Town Council Jan. 8 about why it took 20 minutes for an ambulance to arrive at their home two years ago when the Essex resident suffered a heart attack.

The family was joined by Puce resident Jason Charlton who lost his father in a similar situation in July after waiting 12 minutes for an ambulance.

Charlton asked Essex Fire and Rescue Service Chief Ed Pillon why firefighters were not dispatched to the Cameron home during the emergency.

Pillon said emergency services are dispatched by a central ambulance control centre after a 9-1-1 call is made. At that time, firefighters were only dispatched for extrication purposes or if an ambulance was delayed. During the medical emergency, Pillon said Essex firefighters were not dispatched to the Cameron home.

Colin Cameron Jr. told council he made the 9-1-1 call, specifically requesting ambulance and fire services. He added that at the time

there were three firefighters living down the road from the Cameron household.

"They could've been there in two minutes instead of 20 minutes," he said.

Ward 1 Councillor Randy Voakes said the tragedy that resulted in Cameron's death wasn't the fault of Pillon or the Town of Essex.

"We did everything we could do," Voakes said. "It wasn't the responsibility of the fire department."

Last month, six of Essex County's seven municipalities agreed to revamp emergency medical services by promising to dispatch fire departments as first-responders in life-threatening situations.

The improvement came as a direct request from Charlton.

Only the Town of Leamington did not make the changes.

Councillor asks to take another look at Essex Memorial Arena

Essex Town Council approved Ward 3 Councillor Paul Innes's motion to bring in a contractor at no cost to perform an independent review of Essex Memorial Arena, Jan. 15.

Innes, who preferred to keep the name of the contractor anonymous at the time of the meeting, said he wanted an assessment and detailed schematics of the structure done, as well as having another look at the costs of adding another ice surface to the building.

"At the end of it, we will have valid construction numbers," Innes told council. "Is (the arena) too much to be resurrected? I don't know. I want to make sure we cover all our bases."

In December 2005, Dillon Consulting Ltd. of Windsor estimated the cost of repairing cracks in the outer walls of the 49-year-old building would be around \$100,000. Their report went on to advise the town that the building would only be structurally sound until 2010.

Ward 1 Councillor Randy Voakes said last year's revenue from the arena was offset by a deficit of about \$30,000.

"This is the third or fourth study we've done," he said. "I don't want to get into studying a study. I'm not comfortable opening up a can of worms when we've already done a study."

Arena design approved

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The province has about \$70 million to dish out for the program, designed to aid municipalities in building recreation facilities, said Chief Administrative Officer Wayne Miller.

Public support for the project was evenly split during the meeting, with some in attendance touting the importance of a new facility and others calling it a "potential white elephant" or "Taj Mahal."

Ross MacDonald spoke up with a concern about taxing seniors once the facility is built.

"People are moving out of Essex and into Colchester and Harrow all the time and to burden them with taxes all at once..." he said.

Essex resident Tom Robson said if the arena isn't built soon, costs will most likely go up and taxpayers may be facing a heavy burden with more of a delay.

"Sure, we've got to pay for things but we've got to think of the young people coming up," he said.

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NOTICE TO THE RESIDENTS OF THE TOWN OF ESSEX

Communities in Bloom Committee, The Mural Committee and The Essex Fun Fest Committee.

Please be advised that the Council of the Town of Essex is seeking interested citizens from all 4 wards to serve on the Communities in Bloom Committee, The Mural Committee and The Essex Fun Fest Committee.

Persons interested in serving on the above Committees should submit their names in writing to the undersigned no later than **Wednesday January 24th, 2007.**

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