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ED DUNN

# Town considers OPP for policing

By DANIEL SCHWAB

In a recorded five-two vote, Essex council agreed to form a steering committee to request a contract price from the Ontario Provincial Police for the same level of service currently being provided by the Essex Police Service.

The motion was brought forward at Monday night's council meeting by Ward 3 Coun. Paul Innes, who asked council to "wake up to the reality that we can't afford municipal policing any longer."

Innes said the Essex Police Service's budget has increased by \$300,000 this year. Council initially sent the budget back to police March 6 asking that it be reduced. It was returned after police slashed it by \$20,000.

It now stands at \$4.25 million, Innes said, up from last year's figure of \$3.93 million.

The 2007 OPP contract budget for Lakeshore is \$3.8 million, despite being bigger than Essex in both size and population, Innes said.

Kingsville's policing budget is also lower, standing at approximately \$2.7 million.

Innes called Kingsville "virtually the mirror image of Essex" in size and population and questioned why the Essex police budget needed to be almost \$2 million higher.

"There is something very

wrong," Innes said. "Our (municipal) budget is in trouble because of policing."

Innes said funding has had to be slashed from infrastructure, public works and the fire department in order to pay for policing.

Innes requested that he and Deputy Mayor Richard Meloche chair the steering committee.

Ward 1 Coun. Randy Voakes, who opposed the motion along with Ward 1 Coun. Morley Bowman, criticized the initiative's speedy passage by council.

"To make a decision like this in 30 seconds is an injustice to our municipality," he said. "Their safety was just decided in 30 seconds."

## User fees for non-Essex residents

People from neighbouring municipalities using recreational facilities in Essex will each be required to pay a \$250 user fee starting August 1.

In a recorded four-three vote, council agreed to have the user fees imposed for non-Essex residents in all recreational facilities throughout Essex, including arenas and swimming pools.

Ward 3 Coun. Paul Innes brought the motion forward to council at the March 19 meeting.

Two weeks ago, Innes suggested the user fee be \$1,000 for each non-Essex

resident.

He said 48 per cent of hockey players currently using Essex Memorial Arena are not from Essex.

"Our taxpayers are paying for it," he said. "I don't think that's fair."

There was concern from Deputy Mayor Richard Meloche about a potential backlash from neighbouring municipalities.

"Other municipalities will reciprocate and that'll affect Essex residents," he said.

Ward 1 Coun. Randy Voakes said the initiative was too premature.

"We're still trying to get a shovel in the ground for a new arena," he said. "I just don't think now is the right time."

But there was support from Mayor Ron McDermott, who said the town has already had discussions with the municipalities of Lakeshore and Kingsville about the possibility of introducing user fees.

With the fees taking effect in August, normal registration costs for most minor league sports will have already been paid and users won't see the added fees until next season.

Town administration will also be drafting a report on the expected impact on the municipality.



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

The government of Ontario could eradicate poverty if it had the desire to do so. The Premier of Ontario has indicated that the upcoming budget will address poverty head-on and we would like to applaud his commitment and desire to do so. Let's

hope that he will include innovations to lift people out of poverty, thus improving their quality of life and ability to provide for their loved ones.

Having an adequate income and being able to provide the necessities of life for one's self and family is perhaps one of the first

steps towards wellness and recovery. We sincerely hope that this month's budget will help some of the most vulnerable Ontarians take those first steps.

*Debbie MacLean  
Melanie Abbey  
Psychiatric Patient  
Advocate Office  
St. Thomas*



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