

# Union says 'two-hatters' aren't an issue here

From page 1.

"When you're dealing with a huge international union, you're dealing with a giant," said Mayor Emmerson.

"The parent union has already taken a firm stand. It opposes contracting out. That is what we do when we hire volunteer firefighters. They work by a contract agreement. The parent union, based in the United States, will eventually dictate to the locals. The parent union will come here and order this local to refuse to work with volunteer firefighters. They've already done this in Toronto."

*"When you're dealing with a huge international union, you're dealing with a giant."*

If similar action is taken in Whitchurch-Stouffville and if the province doesn't step in, the town will be forced to switch to a full-time fire brigade, said Mayor Emmerson.

"It will end up costing a tremendous amount. If you factor in the cost of training, it will be in the millions," said Mayor Emmerson. "Of course, it will impact on taxes. They can only go up."

Of the Whitchurch-Stouffville Fire Department's 54 volunteers, 24 are "double hatters," said Deputy Chief Beckett. "If we were forced to drop 24, it would pose a safety threat to the community. This is a real mess. It is a very serious issue. We're seeking legal counsel. We have to know where we stand. When a large union wields its ugly arm, we have to notice."

When Local 4152 calls a meeting, volunteer firefighters are not on the agenda, said Mr. Winters. "We are not talking about it. Currently, the issue is being discussed by the Ontario Fire Marshal's Office, the Ontario Provincial Firefighters' Association and the volunteer firefighters association," he said.

*"If we were forced to drop 24 (firefighters), it would pose a safety threat to the community. This is a real mess. It is a very serious issue."*

At the present time, the five full-time firefighters are trying to iron out their first contract with the town. "Our local still has public safety as a number one priority and is trying to complete our first contract with the town," said Mr. Winters.

"I have said it many times to date, when it comes to operations, it is business as usual. Our negotiations process is going well and we have a good relationship with management and with the negotiation committee."

On Tuesday, Mayor Emmerson joined council in refusing to hire a full-time prevention officer and a full-time fire suppression officer. Council deferred the hirings to the town's 2003 budget review. The cost of the two new staff members was estimated at \$120,000 a year or two per cent of the town's operating budget.

The local full-time firefighters joined the union only to have a say in the event that the Whitchurch-Stouffville Fire Department was taken over by a York Region fire service, Mr. Winters said earlier.

"That's all there is to it," Mr. Winters added.

Fire services for 2002 in Whitchurch-Stouffville cost just over \$1.1 million.



**TIM BECKETT:** Deputy fire chief says town is seeking legal advice on potential loss of part-time firefighters.

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