

Town saving money on councillor newsletters

Too busy, not keen on distribution

BY SANDRA BOLAN
sbolan@yrmg.com

Even before the economy took a nose dive, Whitchurch-Stouffville council was thrifty with its public relations spending, as they handed in receipts for just over half of the \$31,000 allotted to it in 2008.

Last year, each councillor was allowed to spend \$2,500 on newsletters to their constituents, however only Ken Ferdinands (\$1,008.19) and Phil Bannon (\$2,494.14) opted to distribute them.

"I know that I am not capturing enough audience through e-mails and community meetings," said Councillor Bannon, who noted many of his ward's residents actually have Newmarket, Durham Region and Mount Albert postal addresses.

"My main goal is to establish an open line of interactive communication with residents. I am making every possible effort to communicate the message to them. If they choose not to read the information or attend meetings, or reply to e-mails, or provide me with an e-mail address, that is their decision, but it does not alter my goal to at least provide the information to them," he said.

For Councillor Susanne Hilton, providing her constituents with newsletters is something she has done in the past, however 2008 and 2009 have been busy for her.

OPEN DOOR POLICY

"The newsletters, in my mind are very important," Ms Hilton said. "In my case, it's not that I've chosen not to ... it's finding the time to get it out."

However, while council is on March break, Ms Hilton is hoping to get a newsletter out.

On the other hand, some councillors and even the mayor opt to forego the newsletter route.

"In almost 20 years in politics, I've never sent out a newsletter," said Mayor Wayne Emmerson.

"I'm always accessible; my door's always open."

"I respond back to messages left on my home phone or my town extension. We seem to be bombarded with papers and

flyers (and) I feel another document would just be lost in the shuffle," said Councillor Richard Bartley.

"I am very active in the community and very approachable. People have no problem calling me day and night with their issues," he added.

"I try to attend as many functions within the town, as well as outside of town, where I am available to speak to constituents should they have any concerns."

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When it came to attending functions on behalf of the municipality, Mr. Bartley led the way for councillors by shaking \$2,540 worth of hands. At the other end of the spectrum, Councillor Rob Hargrave spent the least on event tickets — \$830.

Mr. Emmerson was out and about the most, which cost the town \$3,948 in 2008.

Last year was the first time the mayor and council had their public relations budget and expenses broken out in the treasurer's annual statement of remuneration and expenses report.

"After the 2007 report was tabled, council expressed their concerns because it wasn't shown what councillors spent on communications," said Marc Pourvahidi, the town's director of finance and treasurer.

In 2007, council passed a bylaw that gave the mayor a \$3,000 pay raise, which took his salary from \$35,000 in 2007 to \$38,000 in 2008.

Salaries for councillors went from \$23,000 in 2007 to \$25,000 in 2008. When the cost of living

was factored in, Mayor Wayne Emmerson's salary was \$39,140 for 2008, while councillors made \$25,750.

The mayor's position is full-time and councillors' part-time. (He also earned \$46,105, plus expenses, as a York Region councillor in 2008.)

The salary increases

were based on data collected by Mr. Pourvahidi that revealed Whitchurch-Stouffville pays its mayor and councillors less than neighbouring municipalities.

SALARY INCREASES

"Our mayor and council members, their level of compensation, still is

today, not quite compatible with surrounding municipalities and it's still lower," Mr. Pourvahidi said.

According to Mr. Pourvahidi, at the beginning of 2007, Aurora's mayor made \$49,000, Georgina's mayor made \$45,000 and King Township's mayoral salary was \$32,000. All positions

were part-time. In Newmarket, where the position of mayor is full-time, the salary was \$61,600.

Councillors in Newmarket made \$28,700 in 2007, followed by East Gwillimbury at \$26,300, Aurora at \$23,300 and Georgina councillors who made \$20,000. All positions were part-time.

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