

Mayor Williams exploring options for amalgamated county police service

By Mike Pickford

Although Orangeville Council voted Monday against a proposal that could potentially lead to regionalization of local fire, police and library services, Mayor Jeremy Williams says he plans to meet with Shelburne Mayor Ken Bennington "in the coming days" to discuss the possibility of amalgamating the Orangeville and Shelburne police services.

Debate swirled around Council chambers on Monday evening (Feb. 12) after Councillor Nick Garisto indicated he would like to see the Orangeville Police Service, Orangeville Fire Department and Orangeville Public Library adopt a more regional approach to their services in a move he believes would help make taxes more manageable for local ratepayers.

Currently, the local fire department services Amaranth, East Garafraxa and Mono, while the police service serves Orangeville only and the library has a user-pay system for out-of-town residents. Coun. Scott Wilson, while voting against Coun. Garisto's motion, indicated he would be willing to consider a county-wide library service. Currently serving as chair of the library board, Coun.

Wilson noted discussions had taken place at the board level, but had not progressed beyond that point.

Most municipalities in Dufferin County currently rely on the OPP for policing, other than Orangeville and Shelburne. It was well documented last year that some members of Council, and indeed the greater community, felt it would be beneficial for the town to enter into an agreement with the OPP to bring policing costs down.

In Shelburne, an OPP costing proposal is already under way. The major concern in that community is that if it decides to continue with its own policing model, the town will have to fund a new, approximately \$6 million facility because the cells at the town hall do not meet provincial standards. This is where Mayor Williams sees a partnership with Shelburne could be beneficial for both parties. "I made it clear at the beginning of my term that greater cooperation with our County neighbours is long overdue. We need to pool resources where it makes sense and work toward common goals," Mayor Williams said. "Orangeville Police Service is already in a position to work with other municipalities to provide various policing services. We have capacity at our building to provide the cells Shelburne needs."

He added, "That would be a huge saving to them as they wouldn't need a new police building. For us, it means generating additional revenues by using the extra capacity of our own existing infrastructure."

While Mayor Williams was clearly optimistic, the rest of Council were not, indicating it was a little late in the current term to consider the option. While he won't be acting on behalf of Council, or even in his duties as mayor, Mr. Williams feels he would be remiss if he didn't at least explore the potential possibilities of such an agreement with Shelburne.

"At this point, working with Shelburne makes sense. They are searching for a solution that we may have for them. Ken and I have spoken about many issues in the past and I want to make sure we both work collaboratively towards the same goal," Mayor Williams said. "I don't expect this process will be without its detractors, or be an entirely easy path, but it is a path that must be explored."

The mayor noted it would come down to the police service boards in Orangeville and Shelburne working together towards this goal in an attempt to ensure the final outcome is beneficial to residents of both communities. While Council seemed against the idea Monday, the mayor hopes they will change their minds should an attractive proposal come about.

"I would expect the councils of our two towns would endorse any proposal that benefits our residents. To not do so would be folly," Mayor Williams said. "I was eager to examine OPP as an option. It was exhaustively explored, but OPP, as an option, failed to be a persuasive one. I now look forward to a brighter future of increased cooperation with our neighbours. I envision that we will eventually move towards a county police service and I see this as that first brave step.

It may come soon, or may take several years, but come it will. Together, let's make this a reality," Mayor Williams concluded.