

Town parts ways with policing consultant, new firm brought in

By Mike Baker

While the Town of Orangeville this week parted ways with a consultant hired to complete a thorough study and analysis of policing service models, municipal staff has assured the Citizen that this setback will not impact Council's ability to make a final, informed decision on the issue by the Dec. 9 deadline.

It was announced on Monday (Sept. 16) that the Town had amicably parted ways with Sarnia-based MPM Consulting, due to irreparable differences in expectations over what a final report by the consulting firm would actually look like.

At this point, there is a different interpretation of requirements for the deliverables and both parties have decided to amicably part ways, said Town spokesperson Sheila Duncan. The Town wants to ensure a comprehensive and unbiased end-to-end review of the first three years (of a contract with the OPP), as well as a multi-year projection of costs between the two services for Council's consideration.

She added, The difference in understanding related to providing estimates beyond the initial contract for long-term analysis. Both the Town and the consultant amicably agreed a new consultant was required to complete the final report to the Town's full expectations.

When reached for comment, Mayor Sandy Brown noted Council is not directly involved in decisions surrounding RFPs, and as such this was a decision driven by Town staff.

MPM Consulting was officially hired back on July 4. According to Ms. Duncan, the Town was to pay the firm \$42,000 to complete the study. An initial 25 percent deposit, amounting to approximately \$10,000, has already been paid although Ms. Duncan indicated that amount would cover any anticipated costs incurred on the project thus far.

The consultant is going to submit an invoice for work to date. Given the preliminary stage of the work, there is an expectation it will not exceed the 25 percent deposit (already paid), Ms. Duncan said.

That money will cover work that MPM Consulting has already completed, such as acquiring background information on the issue and carrying out interviews with individuals from both OPS and OPP. This information will be transferred to the new consultant, Pomax Consulting Inc., who were formally hired by the Town on Wednesday (Sept. 18).

At an information night held at the Orangeville Opera House last week, representatives from the OPP indicated it could carry out policing services in Orangeville at a cost of approximately \$8.1 million annually over the course of a three-year transitional contract with the Town.

That total covers expenses only, and doesn't include any potential revenues the provincial force could, conceivably, bring in.

While OPS promised a zero percent increase to its budget for the fifth successive year in 2019, approving a net budget of \$8.2 million, the local force's expenses top out at approximately \$9.7 million for this year. Revenues for this year, which includes income from criminal record check orders and traffic tickets, are anticipated to be in the region of \$1.95 million.

The major questions coming from Council and the greater general public relates to the proposed cost of service for OPP beyond the initial three-year transitional contract. According to OPP Contract Analyst Linda Davis, the OPP will be collecting data throughout the first three years of service in Orangeville, and will then use that information to form a more refined service for the community. As such, projections for cost of service in year four and beyond are difficult to predict. As was the case during the previous process, which ended in 2017, OPP has refused to provide any details for costs beyond the three-year transitional contract.

During the previous costing proposal, Town CAO Ed Brennan and former treasurer Marc Villeneuve predicted the municipality could save as much as \$4.3 million annually by transitioning to OPP. In the end, the Council of the day was split, with three votes in favour of keeping OPS and three in favour of bringing in the OPP. Former Deputy Mayor Warren Maycock was the deciding vote. While he sided with OPS, he maintained he had only done so to allow the community's next Council, and indeed the public, to re-assess the issue and make a final decision once and for all.

The Town has until Dec. 9 to decide whether it wants to keep its 155-year-old local police force, or disband it in order to facilitate a move to the OPP. Ms. Duncan informed the Citizen that, while terminating the contract with MPM Consulting was certainly a setback, it should not drastically effect a schedule drawn up by the Town that indicates a consultant's report that was to be presented to Council on Oct. 21. Due to the federal election occurring on that date, it is expected the meeting will be moved to Oct. 22.

?We believe that given the background work and overall experience of the firms that submitted for the RFP, a new consultant would be able to maintain the original schedule,? Ms. Duncan said. ?That being said, that will need to be confirmed upon signing of the new contract. We are looking at Oct. 22 for the consultant's presentation, but that will need to be confirmed in the process.?

The full schedule for meetings and events leading up to Council's final decision on Dec. 9 is as follows:

Oct. 22: Presentation of consultant's report

Oct. 28: Public comments on the provision of policing services for the Town

Nov. 11: Staff report/recommendations on the provision of policing services for the Town

Dec. 9: Council decision on the provision of policing services for the Town.