

Police services board attacked on legal fees, communication

Orangeville Council's session Monday night became a bit heated when James Giovanetti, president of the Orangeville Police Association (OPA), asked Council to inquire into the legal costs related to the coroner's inquest into the cell death of Adam Sprague.

Mr. Giovanetti said that over the last year, friction between the OPA and the Orangeville Police Services Board has resulted in concerns not being addressed, as well as a strained relationship.

He said that last October, the Association sought an opportunity to meet and discuss our concerns with the Police Services Board. One of our concerns was in regard to the Adam Sprague inquest. We were not permitted the opportunity.

Mr. Giovanetti addressed council regarding these concerns in a letter on July 17, requesting that the Mayor and police services board assess the legal fees spent on both the Sprague case and Police Services Act charges against Constable Stephen Fisher who pled guilty to the charges. He said it was found the legal fees paid by the Board were more than \$600,000.

"The residents of our community deserve to know their money is being spent carefully," he said. "We simply believe that with open, respectful dialogue many of these litigious events could be solved and could potentially save the taxpayers of Orangeville hundreds of thousands of dollars."

However, Mayor Rob Adams, who is on the Board, said the high fees were due in part to an additional lawyer having been requested by the OPA during the cases to represent their other officers.

"The Association and particularly the President lobbied very hard to have officers that were involved not covered by our solicitor but to have a separate lawyer," said Mayor Adams. "I went out of my way to be cooperative, to assist and intervene, particularly in the case of the hearing."

He added that the plan had been to allow one lawyer to represent everyone, which from a taxpayers' standpoint would have been the best possible solution. However, the President of the OPA had insisted on another lawyer, which was where additional fees started to come in.

In the interest of keeping strong relations and following the collective agreement, Mayor Adams and the Board agreed to provide an additional lawyer for non-guilty officers.

"To argue that the Association is here to protect the taxpayers' rights is a joke," said Mayor Adams. "You cannot on the one hand demand an extra lawyer be added, and then in the paper and on social media complain that a second lawyer has run up costs."

But according to Mr. Giovanetti, the bigger issue is the Board's refusal to meet and discuss the issues. In November 2013, the Association had asked to be put on the agenda for the Board's public meeting, and was blocked not only from speaking, but from providing any form of correspondence to the Mayor, Board Chair and other members present.

This lack of communication had led to the OPA taking the Board to litigation to try to negotiate the dispute. According to Mayor Adams, this made Mr. Giovanetti's presentation and comments to council out of line.

"It is completely inappropriate to try to publicly address this Board during a hearing," said Mayor Adams. "It is not council that decides these matters and it is not appropriate to continue this discussion when this is an ongoing matter in front of litigation."

He added that he would be happy to meet with Mr. Giovanetti and OPA members at any time to work things out, but would not be willing to have further conversation surrounding matters that are currently before an arbitrator.

"There are a lot of really great men and women on our force, and they do a really great job," said Mayor Adams. "That message is

getting lost in all of this, and that's what is frustrating me the most. There is so much negativity on our force right now.?

Some members of the Orangeville Police Service apparently share the mayor's feelings, having written to the Board and the media expressing their concern for the situation and making it known that they do not support Mr. Giovanetti's actions.

According to one of the letters, Mr. Giovanetti proceeded with his presentations to Council without giving proper notification to other members of the Association, and against their wishes, stating that his actions have left them embarrassed to be a member of the OPA.

Some of the public present did support Mr. Giovanetti's request to council to consider his recommendations, which included lobbying the Association of Municipalities of Ontario to press for changes to the Police Services Act that would allow municipalities to make more informed decisions that would benefit the police, municipality and local taxpayers.

?Sustainable policing in Orangeville, and the rest of Ontario, requires meaningful change,? Mr. Giovanetti said at the end of his presentation.