

March 7, 2006

A meeting of the Finance & Administration Committee of Council was held this evening with Chair Deputy-Mayor Scott presiding and all members of the Committee in attendance with the exception of Councillors Henderson and Levasseur. Staff members present were C.A.O., T. Lapierre, Treasurer, LeeAnn Eckford and Fire Chief, F. Boucher.

MINUTES:

On motion of Councillor White, seconded by Councillor Lafreniere, the minutes of the Regular meeting of February 7, 2006 were approved, as circulated. CARRIED

1. FIRE DEPARTMENT

(a) 2005 Annual Report

Deputy-Mayor Scott pointed out the significant decrease in false alarms over the past year, noting a 70% reduction.

Councillor White noted a discrepancy in the figure for dollar losses at the Morris Street fire which showed an amount of \$25,000. Fire Chief Boucher apologized noting that figure should read \$150,000.

(b) February, 2006 Monthly Report

The report was accepted as an information item.

Chief Boucher pointed out that in the month of February there were no false alarms. It was also his pleasure, he noted, to advise the Committee that just recently the Renfrew County Mutual Aid group had agreed to form a 'Media Relations Committee' which would take on the task of advertising for the whole of the County as a group. As well, they have also decided to form a 'Training Committee' which will co-ordinate all training sessions in the County of Renfrew. He noted his pleasure in this having been accomplished just prior to his retirement as the Chiefs associated with the Renfrew County Mutual Aid Group had worked on this for many years.

Chief Boucher introduced several new volunteer Fire Fighters, noting Christine Kaul, Chris Lacroix, Kristen Schruder, Luke Dunn and David Ellis were in attendance tonight.

As well, Tom Watkins and Scott Wood were also new volunteers although they were not in attendance tonight.

Prior to Chief Boucher leaving the meeting, Deputy-Mayor Scott pointed out this is the last meeting the Chief will attend in his capacity as Fire Chief. He thanked the Chief, on behalf of Council, for his 31 years of dedicated service to the Pembroke Fire Department and the community at large. He expressed Council's wishes for a healthy and happy retirement.

2. ADMINISTRATION

(a) 2006 BUDGET

The Treasurer brought the Committee up-to-date on the progress on the 2006 budget. She noted that staff were asked to provide a preliminary budget by February 28th. Most departments have provided their preliminary requests, although there are a few still missing. She noted that she has already met with Dave Unrau and the Fire Chief as they will be leaving the City's employ shortly and she wanted to be comfortable with their proposals before they left. She added that she will be scheduling meetings with the balance of the staff for next week and once she has had an opportunity to consolidate the information, she will meet with Council to discuss the scheduling of the formal budget deliberations.

Continuing, the Treasurer went over some of the figures that will be affecting this years budget, as follows:

- Lake Street debenture paid off in 2005 - that \$400,000. annual payment will now be directed to the Miramichi debt;
- Provincial Government financial commitment through the Ontario Municipal Partnership Fund estimated to be \$4,108,674. for the year 2006, a reduction of \$188,468.
- Federal Gas Tax for 2006/07 - \$263,046. - same as last year;
- Municipal reassessment shows an overall increase in the residential class of about 12%
- Increase in O.M.E.R.S. costs approx. \$55,000.
- Increase in Employee Health Benefits approx. \$45,000. or 13%
- Insurance costs up 22% (\$41,500.) over last year - although seems high, have been told most other municipalities saw an increase upwards to 70% - our 'experience rating' good which kept the increase below what others experienced;

- 2006 is an Election Year and costs incurred for that;
- Normal increases due to rising costs for wages, fuel, hydro, etc.

Councillor Lafreniere questioned why the Ontario Municipal Partnership Fund dollar amount would be reduced in this day and age when everything is going up and the Government is still downloading programs and services to municipalities on a constant basis.

The Treasurer advised that the formula the Province uses to calculate it is complicated, making it very difficult to figure out why the City would end up with less. She noted that it starts with a base figure for social programs, then an equalization factor is applied, a 'per household' figure applied and then several other factors worked into the formula.

Councillor White noted that that very question was asked of the Minister of Municipal Affairs at one time and even he could not explain how the figure is arrived at.

In conclusion the Treasurer noted as well that the devolution of the Ontario Municipal Employees Pension Fund will add costs and these costs will have to be included in the years to come.

(b) 2006 INTERIM TAX BY-LAW

The Treasurer advised that a by-law to provide for an interim tax billing will be presented at tonight's Council Meeting. She pointed out that normally the by-law would allow for the billing of 50% of the amount of the total 2005 taxes. As 2006 is a 're-assessment' year, she felt it would be more equitable to apply 50% of the 2005 tax rate to the new assessment value. She believed this would assist the taxpayers in understanding how the new assessment value will affect their 2006 taxes and give them time to appeal their assessment, should they wish to. She pointed out that the appeal deadline is March 31st.

(c) DEDICATED GAS TAX

The Treasurer advised that the City had received notice that they would be receiving \$118,641. this year from the Federal Gas Tax funding program on behalf of the City and the Township of Laurentian Valley. A by-law will be going to Council this evening authorizing the signing of the agreement.

(d) ONTARIO STRATEGIC INFRASTRUCTURE FINANCIAL AUTHORITY

The Treasurer advised that the City made application for OSIFA funding back in February for the City's share of the cost to construct Miramichi Lodge. Although at the time she had been warned that an initial look at the City's application was not promising, she had been notified last week that the application had since been approved. Appealing to the decision-makers, she noted that the City had pointed out to them that it was the mega-projects required by the Province that were affecting the City's borrowing rating and that it would be unfair to turn the City down when the work was required by the Province. In conclusion she stated that a by-law would be brought forward to the March 21st meeting authorizing the signing of the financing agreement. She pointed out the 20 year interest rate through OSIFA would be equal to the 10 year rate given by the Bank.

(e) RESURRECTION LUTHERAN CHURCH REQUEST

MOTION: Moved by Councillor White,
Seconded by Councillor Lowe,
THAT the Resurrection Lutheran Church's request to use Coronation Park from August 30 to September 2, 2006 for their Outdoor Public Bible Reading be approved. CARRIED

CAUCUS MEETING:

On motion of Councillor O'Neill, seconded by Councillor Lowe, the meeting agreed to move to an in-camera session of the Finance & Administration Committee to discuss litigation, potential litigation, the receiving of advice that is subject to solicitor-client privilege, labour relations or the security of the property of the municipality. CARRIED

The meeting then adjourned on motion of Councillor Lafreniere, seconded by Councillor Severin.