

Lots of satisfaction as Town reviews police budget

By Bill Rea

Policing costs in the Town of Caledon are slated to go up next year, but not by a great deal.

Town councillors recently heard a presentation on the proposed budget, and the proposed increase is about 1.52 per cent; from the \$12.596 million budgetted for 2017 to \$12.788 million next year.

Town Treasurer Heather Haire said there have been enhancements to the police contract, as well as increases in service costs and equipment. On the positive side, the increases have been offset by some \$320,000 in grants.

Haire said there are no plans at this time to use reserves, although that could change if circumstances require it.

Councillors heard from Inspector Ryan Carothers, commander of Caledon OPP, who said the force's contract with the Town includes such items as bike patrol, the commercial motor vehicle team, community response unit, court officers, a dedicated traffic unit, a crime analyst, domestic violence coordinator, emergency response team, street crime units, a mental health crisis team, a Reduce Impaired Driving Everywhere (RIDE) team, school resource officers and victim services.

Carothers also outlined the detachment's priorities for 2018.

They include going after the four main causal factors in traffic accidents (distracted driving, speed, not using seat belts and impairment).

Carothers said 2016 saw a decrease in the number of 'Big 4' charges. Speeding was the most common offence, with 10,860 charges laid, and that was down seven per cent from the previous year. There were decreases in the other three categories too, with 260 charges for impaired driving, 822 for seatbelt violations and 609 for distracted driving.

Other priorities include increasing commercial vehicle inspections and driver education; acquiring data on how to focus patrols; reducing property, drug and violent crime; reducing impaired driving through enforcement, engagement and education; increasing youth engagement; working on the Mental Health Crisis Team; and transfer of care protocols.

The local police are making a difference in the community, Carothers maintained.

He cited the collaborative partnership between the Peel branch of the Canadian Mental Health Association and the detachment, with the team following up on people dealing with problems, and connecting them with appropriate agencies.

He also pointed to the new police office in Belfountain. He said it's been working 'fantastic,' helping to improve response times on the west side of town.

Carothers commented that Caledon is regarded as a leader in traffic enforcement, adding there have been benefits from a number of community partnerships, such as with Caledon-Dufferin Victim Services, Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE), etc.

There had been some concern about the future of DARE, but Carothers assured councillors it's going to continue. It's part of the effort to interact with youth, along with the annual Youth Leadership Camp and Shop with a Cop at the Holidays.

He also pointed to the detachment's auxiliary unit, which has 25 members that volunteer at many events in the community.

'We can't say enough about the auxiliary program,' Carothers remarked.

In terms of traffic enforcement numbers, Carothers said they are down a bit from previous years, although he said they are still getting a lot of complaints. 'We take those complaints seriously,' he said.

There had been 65 charges for impaired driving or driving with too much alcohol up to that point of the year, compared to 148 in all of 2016 and 173 in '15. He also said the hours devoted to RIDE were down too, although he said things will get busier as the Holidays approach.

For violent crimes, Carothers had statistics for 2016, and he said things were down 2.16 per cent from the previous year, but there was a 12.68 per cent increase in property crimes. He said there are a number of reasons for that, such as break-ins involving vehicles, and police have responded with programs like Lock It or Lose It. Despite that, he said there are still people who leave their cars unlocked with wallets in plain view.

There was also a 26 per cent decrease in drug-related occurrences in 2016.

In terms of traffic fatalities, Carothers said there were seven in 2016, and he said there was no detectable pattern to them.

He also commented on the success of the Crime Abatement Program in Caledon. This deals with people who are subject to court orders, and officers checking on them to make sure they are complying.

A community satisfaction survey was conducted in 2015, with 99.7 per cent replying that they had a positive sense of security in their home and community. As well, the results stated 91 per cent have confidence in contacting police, 94.8 per cent thought there was a high quality of police service and 92.9 per cent were satisfied or very satisfied with police visibility in the community.

'Those are high numbers, and I'm very proud of those numbers,' he said.

Councillor Annette Groves was glad to see the focus on community engagement.

She also said the mental health initiatives, DARE and the education programs all fit together. She said the money was well spent on these efforts, as it generates confidence and self-esteem in kids.

Groves agreed DARE is essential.

"We have a lot of drugs out there in the community," she declared, and DARE "is an important source of information on that for young people. They don't know what's out there."

She also suggested it might be useful for students in Grade 9, since they face a different situation in high school.

Carothers told her programs like DARE and having school resource officers come at a cost, but agreed there is a return on investment, including the future of the young people, and what it costs later to put one of these people in jail.

Mayor Allan Thompson agreed about the value of DARE.

"My kids have benefitted from it," he said.

"Thanks for a job well-done," Councillor Gord McClure said.