

Town opposes cut to OPP?budget hike

By Bill Rea

Peel Region wants Caledon OPP to chop one per cent from its proposed budget increase for 2014, and the Region can expect to hear reaction to that today (Thursday).

Inspector Rose DiMarco, detachment commander, appeared before Town council Tuesday outlining her opposition to the idea. She is on the agenda to address Regional council today, accompanied by Town Treasurer Fuwing Wong. Town councillors urged them both to stress the savings and efficiencies that the detachment has already realized.

In his report to Town council, Wong stated the Region has asked all tax-supported programs look at impacts of a one per cent cut. He added the current forecasted increase for next year is 5.6 per cent, and a one per cent cut from that would amount to almost \$120,000.

There are couple of options that could reduce the local OPP programs to realize the savings. Wong stated staff was recommending none of them.

DiMarco told Town councillors crime rates in Caledon dropped slightly from 2011 to 2012, but she added the complexity of police work, and the amount of work officers have to do to prepare cases for court, etc. has increased.

The vast majority of calls the Caledon detachment receives (on the order of 91 per cent) are not related to criminal activity. "We still deal with many, many calls that are not captured in the crime statistics," she observed, adding that while they may not be crime-related, these calls often have to be answered by two officers. DiMarco cited the example of mental health occurrences, which have been increasing over the last couple of years. Once a person has been arrested under the Mental Health Act, she said officers have to stay with them at the hospital until patient has been seen by a doctor. In the average case, officers have to stay at the hospital for up to three hours, but there are times when they have to stay there six to eight hours.

Officers are also busy on traffic enforcement, with an average of 27 speeding tickets handed out per day.

DiMarco said a community satisfaction survey was conducted on the detachment last year. It revealed 85 per cent were satisfied or very satisfied with enforcement of aggressive driving laws, and 93 per cent are satisfied with drinking and driving enforcement. The quality of police service provided in Caledon received 93 per cent approval, she said.

She added the crimes that are of most concern to residents are violence and drugs in schools, break-ins and thefts, vandalism and property crime, drug and alcohol crimes and youth crime, including kids gathering in streets.

Wong told councillors the detachment's budget for 2012 was about \$11 million, but the expenditures came in about \$100,000 under budget, and that money went into the Caledon OPP?Stabilization Reserve Fund. Wong added there had been a budgeted draw of \$700,000 from that fund which wasn't used.

There have been other efficiencies.

Wong pointed to the consolidation of police facilities in town through last year's opening of the new station near Caledon East. He said that amounts to a saving of about \$300,000 annually.

Wong added there are a number of pressures that will be on the OPP budget next year. The proposed budget increase would amount to a little more than \$647,000. That's based a projected labour settlement anticipated for 2014, as well as anticipated inflationary costs that aren't connected with salaries, such as vehicles, uniforms, equipment, etc.

There are no plans to increase the complement of the detachment.

To cut \$120,000 from the budget would mean a reduction of one uniformed officer from one of the programs. That could be from Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) or the OPP Kids programs, or one of the school resource officers. That officer could also come from the Community Response Unit or Traffic Unit.

Wong repeated none of these options were being recommended.

Mayor Marolyn Morrison observed the ratio of officers to residents in Caledon is low compared to the rest of Peel or the rest of Ontario. She urged DiMarco and Wong to highlight that.

She also anticipated Regional councillors or staff would argue that all the departments are being asked to shave one per cent from their budget increases. She stressed the need to make the point that the Regional police service has grown steadily over the years, while the policing numbers in Caledon have not.

"I think we've been very, very responsible in the way we've been doing it," she remarked.

Councillor Patti Foley pointed to the geographic size of Caledon, also observing police are very visible and effective in Bolton. She also said the items that could be cut, like the school programs, are pro-active. Getting rid of them would be a backwards step and a mistake, she argued.

?I wouldn't be prepared to accept that,? she declared.

Councillor Richard Paterak observed that Caledon has been moving from a rural to urban community, pointing out that urban policing is more expensive. He commented on the need to stay on top of it.

DiMarco agreed that as things get more urbanized the calls for service are likely to increase.

Councillor Rob Mezzapelli commented on the importance to stress the fact that calls to police are up in Caledon, even if crime is down. He added one of the reasons crime is down is because of the police presence in schools, and he stressed the need to promote that to the Region.

As well, Mezzapelli said they should expressed the efficiency of OPP at the Region, noting the policing cost per resident is lower in Caledon than the rest of Peel.

Councillor Allan Thompson didn't want to see any of the school programs dropped.

?It's 100 per cent of our future,? he remarked.

He also pointed to the results of the community satisfaction survey.

?I don't know of another police force that can get that kind of endorsement,? he declared.

Morrison observed the detachment has already found more than a one per cent saving from the consolidation of stations.

?I think you need to just show it to them,? she commented.

Councillor Nick deBoer observed a lot of the traffic running through Caledon is from outside the town. He said this is not the time to be cutting back on policing, adding if anything, more is needed, especially in terms of traffic enforcement.