

Council sets stage for police amalgamation

On Wednesday, November 6th, Innisfil Council gave third and final reading to a By-law authorizing the municipality to enter into an agreement with Bradford West Gwillimbury to amalgamate policing services.

And last night, Bradford West Gwillimbury Councillors voted 6-3 in favor of passing a similar By-law, removing the final obstacle to the creation of a new South Simcoe Police Service.

Councillor John Gabriel was one of those who had been "flip-flopping" on the issue, wondering, "if a

wheel's not broken, why fix it?" He said that the last week had been an opportunity to talk to more individuals within the community. "I've had my concerns or questions answered... I'm looking at the proactive side of it. I can't see any major problems of amalgamation."

The meeting on Tuesday night was an opportunity to ask some last-minute questions of the two Police Chiefs of the municipalities. Councillors learned that some of Bradford West Gwillimbury's aging communications equipment would have to be replaced

whether or not amalgamation went ahead, at an estimated cost of \$35,000. By amalgamating, and sharing Innisfil's equipment, the total cost to Bradford West Gwillimbury would be reduced.

Councillor Ron Simpson wondered if contract negotiations with Innisfil's uniformed officers, reported to be asking for a 5% wage increase, would affect the 1997 Policing budget.

Chief Davis responded that the Police Association had requested a 4% increase, not 5%, and that the counter-offer was 0%. "Should either Police Service have an

increase, that increase would come whether we are together or whether we are
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separate," he pointed out, adding that amalgamation might generate efficiencies which could offset wage increases.

Other concerns stemmed from a last minute suggestion by an Innisfil Councillor, that her municipality should request a costing by the O.P.P. The motion was withdrawn on November 6th, but some Councillors worried that the issue could be raised after amalgamation. They were told that any request for an O.P.P. costing would have to be approved by the Police Services Boards - which is unlikely.

"This amalgamation will provide a better service," Davis concluded. "This is not a takeover, but a merger."

In the vote, Dennis Roughley, John Gabriel, Gary Lamb, Peter Dykie, John Gorzo and Mayor Frank

Jonkman voted in favor of the By-law. Ron Simpson, Betty Lou Vanderpost and Deputy Mayor Bud Brown voted against.

Later the Mayor noted that the amalgamation issue was one of the most controversial faced by Council. "It might be a long time before we get such a controversial subject again."

On October 15th, Councillors defeated the By-law authorizing the amalgamation agreement with Innisfil, by a vote of 5-4.

A motion to reconsider was presented on November 5th, after the Ontario Civilian Commission on Policing Services (OCCOPS) released a report approving the amalgamation proposal, but was put over for another week, when Councillors still could not agree.

On the 5th, a number of individual members of the Bradford West Gwillimbury Police Service came forward, urging Council to support the proposal. Their concern was that, without a "pro-active" approach, the province could step in to legislate an amalgamation, or possibly a takeover by the O.P.P.

It was a fear that Deputy Mayor Bud Brown suggested was unfounded. "I really feel that the benefits of this amalgamation are far more to Innisfil than to Bradford West Gwillimbury," Brown said, adding that there was no evidence that the province intends to legislate amalgamations.

However, there was one other speaker at the meeting. A representative of the Solicitor General's office told Council, "The status quo in policing will not remain the same in the province. Major

restructuring will take place." He declined to be more specific, but added, "You've taken an initiative here to take some control over your delivery of police services."