

Close vote on police service amalgamation

It was a close vote, but on Monday night, Bradford West Gwillimbury Council passed a resolution supporting the proposal "in principle" to amalgamate the Bradford West Gwillimbury and Innisfil Police Services, and begin negotiating an amalgamation agreement.

The vote was 5-4 in favor of proceeding with the process, with several councillors expressing strong reservations.

"I don't think they've proven there's any substantial benefit to amalgamation," said Deputy Mayor Bud Brown, suggesting that the predicted \$539,000 in savings over a five year period might never materialize. He said the amalgamation process "has a life of its own...there seems to be no way to stop it", and

noted that the municipality had decided against a larger police force 5 years ago.

"The feeling I get from the public is that they're happy with the force they have."

Councillor Betty Lou Vanderpost agreed. "The savings are not what has been indicated in the report," she claimed. "I think we have to look at this for our budget, and the implications for our budget." She pointed to start-up costs, communications system upgrades and training costs, and added, "I have real concerns that we are looking at the true figures."

Councillor John Gabriel, chair of the Finance Committee, accepted the projections of the municipal treasurers that savings were possible, and that the agreement would freeze policing costs at the 1996

level for the next two years - but found a reason for concern in that promise.

Gabriel worried that the "freeze" might make it impossible for Council or the Police Services Board to cut the Police budget, in light of future provincial funding cuts. He asked for an assurance that Council could reduce the Police budget, if necessary.

Innisfil Police Chief Bruce Davis replied that the budget would be a matter for the PSB and Council to determine at budget time, and if cuts were required, that would be a matter for negotiation.

Davis argued out that a suggestion that the municipalities should wait for the introduction of a County-wide police force was pointless; there is no indication that there will be a

County-wide police force, but every indication that "the path we are taking is not contrary to" what is recommended by the province. More than 22 Police Services are currently involved in amalgamation talks, he said.

Mayor Frank Jonkman was one of those supporting amalgamation. He agreed that there might not be substantial cost savings in the long run, but pointed to "increased efficiency and much better service" that would be possible in an amalgamated force.

In the vote, Dennis Roughley, John Gorzo, John Gabriel, Gary Lamb and Frank Jonkman supported the amalgamation process, while Betty Lou Vanderpost, Ron Simpson, Peter Dykie and Bud Brown were opposed.