

Police amalgamation hearing

On October 10th, the Ontario Civilian Commission on Police Services (OCCOPS) convened a public meeting at the Churchill Community centre, to hear the amalgamation proposal of the Bradford West Gwillimbury and Innisfil Police Services.

Approximately 50 people attended the hearing. Most were members of Police forces, Police Services Boards or local Councils; only a handful were residents, there to hear the presentation, or to comment on the proposal for a "South Simcoe Police Service."

OCCOPS Commissioners Karl Fuller and Ray Silenzi heard the presentation by Bradford West Gwillimbury Chief of Police John Harrison and Innisfil Police Chief Bruce Davis, outlining proposed staffing changes, division of services, costs and projected savings.

They were told that an agreement has been drafted, and that the strategic planning process will begin, as soon as approval is given. The two services began Planning meetings on August 27th, to look at the integration of the two Employees Associations, and harmonize shift schedules "to enable us to plan for the future, should you approve it," said Chief Davis.

The proposal was "not perfect", Davis admitted, but he called it an attempt to avoid the errors and conflicts of the past, "and hopefully provide a building block for the future... Separately, we are good. Unified, we feel we would be better."

The Commissioners then invited comment from the public.

Mayor Frank Jonkman noted that "there's not a whole lot of money going to be saved" by amalgamation, but expressed a hope that with the improved efficiency resulting from merging the two services, "we should be able to hold the line" on the budget, in the face of funding cuts and increasing costs.

Amalgamation, he said, offered "better resources that can deal with various problems at a more efficient level."

Innisfil Mayor Stewart Fisher asked the Commissioners to push for a grant contribution from the province, to cover the start-up costs, noting that there is a precedent for provincial

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assistance for amalgamation.

Commissioner Fuller was sympathetic, but offered no promises. "It's a story we hear everywhere we go, that municipalities are hard-pressed," he said.

"Unfortunately, it's just outside of our jurisdiction."

The only comments from the general public were made by Bradford West Gwillimbury resident Paul Wright, who wondered "how it's going to benefit any of

the members from the community", and challenged the calculation of costs which assigns 58.8% of costs to Innisfil, 41.18% to Bradford West Gwillimbury.

Chief Davis responded that the assessment figures were provided by the municipal treasurers, "so we feel they are as accurate as we can get."

He also assured Wright that "service to the community would be of

utmost importance." There would be no decrease in level of service on amalgamation, he insisted. "The community is the people we serve."

Commissioner Fuller then closed the meeting, and promised a decision on the "adequacy" of the proposed South Simcoe Police Service, "as early as humanly possible."

But plans to implement amalgamation by January 1st, 1997, have been dealt a setback. In a meeting of Bradford West Gwillimbury Council last night, Councillors defeated a By-law that would have authorized the Mayor and Clerk Administrator to execute an agreement with Innisfil, to amalgamate police services.

Councillors had earlier voted to give the By-law 1st and 2nd reading, withholding 3rd and final reading until the OCCOPS decision was received - but last night argued that the vote itself was "premature."

"I see no urgency," said Betty Lou Vanderpost. "This is a real big decision."

The By-law was defeated, 5-4.