

Rental Relief in Hastings Highlands

Some months ago I wrote about how our non-tax revenues had slipped substantially in the past ten years, and recently the municipality has been working to shine some light on the user fees question.

Some history is in order here

Since the 5 townships were amalgamated in 2000, little has been done to create one municipality. Then two years ago there was a drive to eliminate the wards, which of course reflected the old townships before amalgamation. The drive was successful and in 2018 we elected Councillors representing all of Hastings Highlands.

And the one municipality drive began in earnest.

But problems remain...how do you create one municipality, with one vision of services and one set of policies on how constituents are treated for services pricing?

So recently, in a very transparent way, this new council set to work to do just that for user fees charged for our facilities. I know...it's a small part of our fiscal package at HH, but it is an important social service. And just as important will be the drive to assess and change our facilities profile to reflect our future needs. That is in the works as well

Now about 25 folks turned up at this public meeting, many of whom expressed concern to me about a pricing and approval process that they simply couldn't understand...who paid full price, who paid a reduced price and who paid nothing and why.

Well as one councillor said at the outset this is going to take some time and we mustn't forget that we are talking about a user pay system... no municipalities today are providing free access to all, nor should we.

This council has started down the road to a transparent and equitable system for user fees for facilities and undoubtedly this will evolve to include many other items...like road allowance purchases, parkland fees, and waste site fees.

But please cut them some slack.... It will take time to develop a clear policy and will require the balancing of some services and facilities at full or reduced rates against the need to recoup the costs of the many facilities we have in HH available for our constituents. Accordingly, Council is excluding user fees for all existing Community Groups in Lake St. Peter and Birds Creek Community Centres until such time as a new Bylaw has been created.

And it's fair to say not all folks will be happy with the end result...If you were expecting free access to all facilities for all groups you will be disappointed.

As you would be for all of our municipal neighbours if you lived there.

Bill Cheshire Baptiste Lake