

TOWNSHIP OF O'CONNOR – PUBLIC MEETING NOTES – AUGUST 16, 2023

Notes of the Public Meeting held on Wednesday, August 16, 2023 at 7 p.m. in the O'Connor Community Centre.

Present: Mayor Vezina
Councillors: Crane, Sobolta, Torkkeli
Clerk-Treasurer Buob

Visitors: Margaret Hill, Donald Hill, Harry Krieg, Lorna Krieg, Sharon Corrigan, Paul Corrigan, Bill Heibein, Sharon Loghrin, Finlay Macdonald, Angie Heath, John Heath, Brenda Holowanky, Rick Bodnar, Remi Labonte, William Chambers, Lynn Chambers, Tim Silvaggio, Jennifer Silvaggio, Axel Nowak, Chad Opyc, Jason Napper, Tammy Cook, Anneli Roblin, Roy Roblin, Michelle Ruhmann, Martin Tempelman, Corinne Tempelman, Lori Macsemchuk, Gary Wrigley, Leslie Scheuerman, Brendan Rea, Stephen Wiebe, Kristina Peterson, Leonard Cole, Swen Ruhmann, Grant Hansen

Absent: Councillor Racicot

Mayor Vezina called the Public Meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Everyone was welcomed to the meeting and the location of all exits, washrooms, etc. were provided to those present. A copy of the final 2023 Township of O'Connor Budget was available at the door for pickup. Mayor Vezina provided a power point presentation on the screen. The presentation explained the goals of the meeting, the budget process, the previous year's deficit and where the Township is planning on going.

Section 290 (1) of the Municipal Act, 2001 was provided, regarding the Township's budget process, and an explanation of the Council's responsibilities regarding a budget, as per Provincial mandate. The external audit process was explained. How the Township budget is funded and the grants that the Township receives from the Federal and Provincial governments were discussed. It was noted that certain funding can only be spent on certain projects and not used to cover a general budget expense, and some services cannot make a profit, for example, the building permit process must only cover the costs to administer the program.

The Municipal Expenses were explained. All monies spent are either operating, capital or mandated and must be recorded as such.

The year-end surplus or deficit and how it is dealt with was explained. The 2022 actual deficit was provided, and Mayor Vezina explained the reasoning for this higher than usual amount. A portion of the deficit was from the mandated programs. Another is the result of the construction costs of the Shop B addition to the Township garage, due to the funding commitment and the increase in construction costs.

The formal presentation concluded at 7:35 p.m. and the floor was opened for questions. Several questions were asked and answered.

One question was why can't overruns be stretched over a period of time. Mayor Vezina noted that the Township cannot carry the deficit over multiple years. The budget has to balance each year and the deficit is the first line item on next year's budget.

Comments were made regarding the increases of the past 10 years and for those on a fixed income, including seniors, the taxes are becoming unaffordable.

Mayor Vezina noted that Council has tried to run along the same increases as the cost of living, as the Township does pay the same bills as our property owners and have increases as well. We also have to meet a minimum maintenance standard for our roads to help avoid any incidents occurring. The levies from the outside agencies that we must pay also increase, resulting in an increase in taxes. The levy increases for the last few years were provided. It was also noted that the individual assessment increases also have different effects for each property.

Concerns were expressed regarding the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC) increasing the values of the homes to charge more taxes. If someone works

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hard to improve their property, they have to pay more taxes. Why are taxes not based on services? It was suggested that Council challenge the Regulations so that property owners are not penalized for making improvements to their property. Another suggestion was made that a tax incentive and reduction in taxes, based on value of improvement, should be implemented. The comment was made that a lot of people do not get building permits because it triggers an increase in their taxes. The question of how to change the MPAC value was asked. Mayor Vezina informed those present that if a property owner does not agree with the Assessment Value provided by MPAC they can request a reassessment.

Mayor Vezina explained that the current method of taxation is based on an 1850 model and Council's have been asking the Minister of Finance to change the method of taxation for years. Our Council, along with members of the Lakehead Rural Municipal Coalition (LRMC) met with the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing in person in 2018 to try and explain how the system is unfair. Several lobby groups have also addressed this matter including the Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association (NOMA). Unfortunately, nothing has happened in this regard. It would be a very complex issue and would have to be implemented throughout the Province of Ontario.

The question of the process to become unorganized was asked and whether a vote could be taken to make this decision was asked. Mayor Vezina noted that at this time it has not been considered and we are unaware of whether it would be allowed.

A question regarding the education taxes and how are they charged was asked. The Province provides a tax rate to charge. That rate is then calculated the same as the Municipal tax rate, using the MPAC assessment values. The municipality collects the money for the boards and submits it to the specific board as designated on the tax roll to each property. All properties are required to pay education taxes.

The question of why the lots at the beginning of Highway 590 are smaller and the rest of the Township is restricted to larger lots. It was noted that those lots were created prior to the first Official Plan of the Township. This meeting was not to discuss this matter.

A question was asked regarding the mandatory programs that the Township pays for. Is there any way to change the funding formulas setting out how these programs are being paid and do the unorganized municipalities have to pay for these programs through their taxes? Mayor Vezina informed them that the province pays for these services for the unorganized and the Lakehead Rural Municipal Coalition (LRMC) have requested change to the funding formula with no success. The consensus was that this is unfair.

The question of how many seniors live in the Township of O'Connor was asked, as these residents are on a fixed income. This number will be looked into.

A compliment was made regarding the condition of the Township of O'Connor roads and the fact that they are the best in the area. There was no concern for spending money on the road system.

Council was thanked for hosting the meeting and for hearing everyone's concerns and the question was asked how can the resident's help to lobby for reduced costs. Can there be a public meeting organized with M.P.P. Holland where the resident's voices can be heard, along with Council. It was suggested that Council come up with a Ways and Means which could have a greater impact.

Mayor Vezina noted that the cutting of the weeds along the sides of the roads was cut from this year's budget. He suggested that to help the budget, residents could cut their own grass in front of their homes. While the Township does not want to take work away from the local contractors, they do offer some services through the Township for snowplowing and contract work for summer maintenance which does bring in revenue.

As all questions were addressed, the Public Meeting adjourned at 9:10 p.m.

Mayor

Clerk-Treasurer