

March 27th Budget Meeting

At the Special Meeting on March 1st I spoke in favour of raising the amounts allocated for the Honorarium, the Grant in Lieu of Fundraising and the Chief's stipend from \$50,650 to \$53,000 (although there is no record of this or any Commissioners' comments in the Minutes of that meeting) and that the Grant in Lieu should be kept separate from the Honorarium. I would request the Minutes of this meeting include these and the following comments and also those of the other Commissioners.

The Chair reported that our lawyer said we could combine the Grant and the Honorarium; it was perfectly legal; he didn't have a problem with it. I struggled with the concept but eventually acquiesced and informed the Chair by e-mail that I believed whatever anyone did with their honorarium would be their business and no one else's. However, given our knowledge of the history of use for the Grant, and the likelihood of that use continuing, plus our obligation for transparency and accountability to the ratepayers, we should keep the Grant in Lieu of Fundraising separate from the Honorarium. Plausible deniability would be no defense should we be challenged on the decision to combine the two.

I understand a Village may give "Grants" for specific purposes only and this is not one of those purposes. Therefore, I am suggesting G/L 5116 be renamed as it was in the 2013-14 Budget: "Monies in Lieu of Fundraising". It is important that we are transparent and that the ratepayers know exactly where their tax dollars are going and why. The Commission of the day gave this grant because they wanted the volunteer firefighters to be able to have time to train and to have time with their families rather than have to fundraise for department activities outside of emergency services. This money will, no doubt, continue to be used as it is currently - for morale-boosting, de-stressing socials with family and fellow members, and for the purchase of clothing identifying them as proud members of the CVFD. It needs to be clear to both the ratepayers and the Commission that bonding and stress relief through social activities is legitimate and necessary for the firefighters' psychological well-being as PTSD is a recognized issue. Google it if you think it isn't a problem. We budget for and charge rates so the CVFD can purchase equipment for the firefighters' health and safety - psychological health is no different than physical health. I think we would be hard-pressed to find people who would disagree with our support of funding this line item.

With regard to the Honorarium, I am hoping the Commission will respect the request for an increase, albeit a lesser amount than asked. The need was clearly outlined in the extensive budget rationale provided by our new Chief, Everett Hiltz. In my research I discovered that former Chief, Duke Chafe, kept records of the number of hours he spent on CVFD business. In 2012 he logged 1067 hours. Had our current stipend of \$10,000 been in force then, that would have worked out to \$9.37 per hour - that's half a year, 26 weeks, of working a 40-hour week at less than minimum wage! I would recommend meeting with the Officers of the CVFD after they have had an opportunity to determine how much should go to the Chief, as we will have to declare this in G/L 5121 and issue a T4A for his stipend.

My rationale for maintaining the three line items we currently have - G/L 5115, 5116 and 5121 - is simple. We are aware of how much money is going where and for what purpose. We are supportive of the amounts allocated and we cannot be accused of obfuscation.

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As this is a budget meeting, let me now give you some numbers. One cent is expected to raise \$74,788 per \$100 of assessment. The following shows the cost to the owner of a house assessed at \$300,000 for the three options presented by Commissioners.

Option 1. Keep the total amount at \$50,650

$\$50,650 / \$74,788 = .677¢$ per \$100 on a \$300,000 house

1¢ = \$30

$.677¢ = \$30 \times .677 = \20.31

Cost: \$20.31

Option 2. Increase the total amount to \$53,000 - more than in 2017/18 but less than requested

$\$53,000 / \$74,788 = .708¢$ per \$100 on a \$300,000 house

1¢ = \$30

$.708¢ = \$30 \times .708 = \21.24

Cost: \$21.24

Option 3. Reduce the total amount to \$45,000

$\$45,000 / \$74,788 = .6¢$ per \$100 on a \$300,000 house

1¢ = \$30

$.6¢ = \$30 \times .6 = \18

Cost: \$18

By reducing the total amount from \$50,650 to \$45,000 we are saving the owner of a \$300,000 house \$2.31 per year. We are talking nickels and dimes, gentlemen and I believe the Members of the CVFD are more valuable than nickels and dimes. I will not support Option 3 and urge you to choose Option 2 as the better of the two remaining options.

The Chester Volunteer Fire Department has a reputation among many as a truly "professional" fire department, second to none in firefighting skills, emergency response and yes, apparatus. They are fortunate to have the funding they have, but we are more fortunate to have them.

(Commissioner Hatch's statement & read at March 27//18 meeting)