

From the Mayor's Chair

Police Services - a Modern, Fact-based Approach.

During the election campaign, I was able to meet a large number of voters throughout the Township and spend a little time through the door to door visits and the coffee group get-togethers. I can tell you that the number one concern was the level of police services and policing in general, particularly when it came to safety on the roads. Issues regarding speeders and the enforcement of speed limits were raised by many. It is understandable when you drive along our rural roads and find yourself inside a settlement area, on roads like Morrison Road, Wrigley Road or Clyde Road. You suddenly find yourself quite close to residential homes and that includes children and family pets. When you drive down Wrigley Road it has a speed limit of 80km per hour which means you will routinely see vehicles travelling up to 100km per hour. Some on Wrigley Road have told me about losing a surprisingly large number of pets and they are quite concerned about the safety of their children. We have made some changes along Morrison Road to the speed limit and we are currently working on a community project in Clyde involving a number of stakeholders.

So police enforcement is a big issue. Shortly after the municipal election Chief Matt Torigian came to visit us at Township council to show the data gathering process that the Waterloo Regional Police Services had embarked upon in order to better assess the level of police services we have in the Region. The program was designed to highlight what police were doing while working with the goal of increasing the amount of proactive time that police had to carry out their duties during their shift. A significant part of this plan included moving many officers from desk jobs to behind the wheel of patrol cars. The plan was to increase the police presence on the street. The plan was developed through a careful and thorough compilation of data that detailed what an officer was busy with in the course of a day, week etc... They were able to break down the time spent in a variety of categories and it was a shock to see how little time is spent being proactive.

The police recently presented their budget for 2012 to Waterloo regional council. It is an interesting budget process. The Police Services Board has overall responsibility for the expenditure of funds on police services. However, it is Regional Council that determines what the available funding will be. Recently the Police Services Board brought a final budget to regional council that provided for a 1.3% increase. This however was not, as you would have read in the press, what Chief Torigian was originally seeking. The Police Services Board reduced the number of police and civilians that Chief Torigian had requested. This request was part of the overall plan that Chief Torigian had developed to ensure that we have sufficient police services for our growing Region. We are one of the top 10 economic communities in Canada, yet in a survey of 17 municipalities in Ontario we rank last in cost per capita for police services. This also comes at a time when violent crime in Waterloo region has been on a steady increase, with a further increase expected when the data is reviewed for 2011.

I was initially concerned that the reduction in Chief Torigian's plan would have an impact on rural services. One of the highlights of Chief Torigian's plan has been the increased presence of police in the rural communities. The township mayors have been very pleased with the increased presence in our community. I inquired with Chief Torigian about the potential impact to rural services. Chief Torigian assured me that there will be no impact on the level of service in the rural area. The rural impact of the Police Services Board cuts may be the necessity to move out of existing rural buildings and develop a "store front" or "office" approach. This could have the potential to expand their presence and reduce costs. Chief Torigian also indicated that in 2013 police services will be expanding their levels by adding a rural patrol sergeant 24 hours a day. This will be accomplished through their new shift schedule that begins as a pilot in January 2013.

In my dealings with Chief Torigian, I find that he is attempting to bring a very modern, fact based approach to policing and ensuring that we have the right level of police services in our community. While it would appear that the recent round of budgeting looked like the same old "horse trading" on numbers, that characterization would do a disservice to the approach of Chief Torigian. I look forward to seeing what Chief Torigian has planned to complete the change to police services in Waterloo Region during the next budget round. A safe community is, after all, one of the most important issues for our residents.

Rob Deutschmann,
Mayor, North Dumfries Township