

Dianne Cornish A real hatchet job
Dianne Cornish, My View
Published on May 09, 2008

It appears that most Hamilton city councillors just don't know how to bury the hatchet.

Media reports out of the Hamilton core suggest the ringleaders who gathered sufficient support to take the Flamboro Slots revenue from Flamborough taxpayers and put it into the general levy were swayed by the personality of Ward 15 councillor Margaret McCarthy. It seems they didn't like McCarthy's style so they buried the hatchet into Flamborough's already oppressed taxpayers.

McCarthy did come on strong. She wanted to protect the revenues that have helped ease the burden of heavy taxes on Flamborough ratepayers. For some around the council table, she was too defensive, too in-their-face, too passionate about defending what many Flamborough residents feel is rightfully theirs. I wonder how defensive Councillors Terry Whitehead or Sam Merulla would have been if it were residents of their wards facing a 9.9 per cent municipal tax increase compared to the city-wide average hike of 3.8 per cent.

If Councillor McCarthy was the fire in the debate over retaining the slot revenues for Flamborough, her rural counterpart, Councillor Robert Pasuta, was the ice. He chose a more moderate, conciliatory approach. He humbled himself before council, thanked them for providing the slots revenues for tax relief over the past seven years and asked for compassion. He got none.

Pasuta argued that a phase-out of the slots revenues was the honourable way to resolve the controversy. McCarthy stressed that a tax increase of nearly 10 per cent for Flamborough compared to a 3.8 per cent city-wide average increase for Hamilton isn't fair or equitable. Yet, amazingly, eight city councillors seemed to think it is fair and voted accordingly.

Despite the difference in styles employed by McCarthy and Pasuta, there was no sign that either tactic would bend the inflexible eight councillors.

I believe these eight councillors failed to exercise the duties of their office. They took an oath to "truly, fairly and impartially" exercise their office. From what I could see, some were clearly riled by comments from the partisan Flamborough crowd and their fiery councillor and voted accordingly. None was fair, unless you believe it's fair to impose a 9.9 per cent increase on one area of the city while the rest gets an average hike of 3.8 per cent. And it certainly isn't fair to impose that magnitude of an increase when there is a choice to mitigate it through a phase-out.

As for "truly," well, I believe you first have to know what is true. Which brings to mind the unanswered question that McCarthy asked about which part of the city has consistently seen the highest hikes in taxes since amalgamation. I urge each of the eight councillors to get the answer from Hamilton's Manager of Finance Joe Rinaldo and then have the courage to introduce a motion for reconsideration of this issue. It's the only course that can be taken, in good conscience.

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