

No surprises

Flamborough Review Editorial

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It should come as no surprise that Hamilton councillors voted to pocket the estimated \$4 million in slots revenues. Nor should it come as a shock that these same councillors representing areas of the old city are doing it in a vengeful manner.

What is surprising is why local residents are shocked by their actions. Last week's vote has been at least three years in the making. Since 2003, councillors from the older parts of Hamilton have grumbled about what they perceive as the unfairness of the former suburban municipalities who only pay for specific services.

Under the area rating system, created under the Hamilton Act of 2001 (which legalized the amalgamation of Stoney Creek, Ancaster, Glanbrook, Dundas and Flamborough), residents were allowed to pay only for the level of service they receive, such as transit, recreation, sewers, emergency services and, in Flamborough, slots revenues.

Over the years, Hamilton councillors have eroded those services from area-rating with the ultimate goal of eliminating the system. They argue that what was once an unequal system between the former city of Hamilton and the suburbs should now be "balanced and fair." Hamilton councillors have argued that Ancaster, Dundas and Flamborough were sometimes receiving free services at the expense of the more deprived former city of Hamilton areas. The argument usually met with an emotional backlash from suburban politicians and the matter was left, with only a band-aid to cover the ever-festering sore.

In 2007, Flamborough councillors agreed to share some of the slots revenues, in the hope of satisfying an increasingly desperate council unable and unwilling to make the necessary spending cuts to its own bloated budget.

This year, councillors ravaged the \$4 million slots revenues for themselves. The result is a projected 10 per cent average tax hike for Flamborough residents, who have had to pay the highest tax increases each year since amalgamation. Hamilton residents, who are already paying the lowest tax increase, get a further break of, on average, \$15 per household.

The looting of Flamborough is expected to continue in June, when councillors debate whether area-rating should continue to exist. If they were at all concerned about the welfare of the suburban communities, councillors would have phased in the process to absorb the Flamboro slots revenues.

For too long, suburban homeowners have paid barrels of tax money and helplessly watched as it was wasted on inner city projects. Hamilton has siphoned off the former suburbs' financial reserves, equipment and self-respect. In return suburban residents have had to listen to the rhetoric of building a community together while snow goes unplowed, grass grows out of control and roads deteriorate.

The terms fair and equitable have been tossed around by Hamilton councillors. But their actions only emphasize the obvious: they are not interested in fairness, or building a better community for all Hamiltonians.

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