

Local - Ticked off over tax hike

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A boisterous crowd of more than a thousand furious Flamborough residents voiced their outrage about their nearly 10 per cent tax hike last night.

Police watched over the rowdy meeting at the North Wentworth Arena that caused traffic jams along Highways 5 and 6.

The meeting, organized by Councillor Margaret McCarthy, was dominated by angry jeering expressing frustration over council's recent decision to take away the community's tax subsidy from Flamboro Downs.

"When is the next election?" yelled one angry resident.

Peter Zanutto questioned why Burlington and Oakville residents have cheaper taxes than Hamilton when they get better services.

"It looks like the city of Hamilton is not capable of running the city of Hamilton," he said, drawing many in the crowd to their feet in a standing ovation.

Since amalgamation in 2000, Zanutto has seen his taxes more than double to hit \$6,000 this year.

"There are no millionaires in Waterdown," he said.

It's been two weeks since council voted 8-7 to share slot revenue from Flamboro Downs across the whole city. The controversial decision raised taxes by nearly 10 per cent in parts of Flamborough -- more than double the increase for the rest of Hamilton.

As anger builds in Flamborough, opponents of the decision have been lobbying unsuccessfully to try to get council to reconsider. They suggest the city should at least phase out the subsidy.

Last night, the crowd hissed and yelled insults at Councillors Terry Whitehead and Scott Duvall who both voted in favour of ending the subsidy to Flamborough. After the meeting, Whitehead said he wanted to "sleep on" what he heard to decide if he would change his vote.

But he said he feared the precedent it could set if councillors changed their decision in the face of "intimidation."

Duvall said he would not change his vote because he felt doing so wouldn't address the issues he heard from Flamborough residents. He does want the city to explore the residents' feeling that they are not getting good services for their tax dollars.

A citizens' group has formed in Flamborough to try to deal with the tax hikes. Janice Downton wants the province to address its tax system that has caused Flamborough's costly tax hikes because of rising assessments. "Market value assessment is fatally flawed."

She also called on the clapping crowd to boycott The Hamilton Spectator because of some of its coverage related to the Flamborough slot debate.

McCarthy urged residents to join together to fight the tax decision. She reminded residents that the former community had very low taxes. "We argued over paper clips."

The community group has set up a website to be launched later this week.

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