

Slot revenue battle heats up Council not expected to change vote on ending Flamborough's subsidy

Stories by Nicole Macintyre
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As rage spreads across Flamborough, councillors are bracing for tonight's showdown over the suburb's whopping tax hike.

Councillor Robert Pasuta spent much of yesterday lobbying his colleagues to phase out a tax subsidy for Flamborough, instead of taking it away in one shot. He fears he doesn't have enough support for a last-minute compromise.

Council voted 9-7 Monday to share \$4 million in slot revenue from Flamboro Downs, instead of keeping it in Flamborough. That means an increase of up to 9.8 per cent in parts of Flamborough -- more than double the rest of Hamilton.

Sharing the slots will save the average Hamilton taxpayer \$15 this year, but cost Flamborough residents upwards of \$200 more.

"This is too much, too soon," Pasuta said. "It's ridiculous."

Waterdown Councillor Margaret McCarthy has called a news conference for later today but refuses to reveal her "plan of action."

Councillors who support sharing the subsidy across the city are also lining up their arguments for tonight.

They argue the subsidy wasn't meant to last forever, only until Flamborough had paid off its debt for fixing Borer's Creek. Plus, they say, Flamborough's taxes have increased because of property assessments, which the city doesn't control. When other areas faced assessment jumps, there were no subsidies.

Ultimately, argues Mountain Councillor Terry Whitehead, it comes down to fairness.

"We share all other revenue."

Mayor Fred Eisenberger remains hopeful, but not confident, that council can reach a deal. He wants a 10-year phase-out, though council rejected a three-year plan. If the slot revenue was shared gradually over a decade, it would cost Hamilton taxpayers a few dollars a year, he said.

"For the cost of a cup of coffee, you're going to generate this kind of acrimony. It just doesn't make sense."

Dundas resident Rod Jefferess said he would happily pay a few dollars more in taxes to save other residents from the huge increase. He fears council's decision will reopen the amalgamation debate.

"This is opening an old wound."

Deamalgamation is certainly back on the lips of Millgrove resident Valerie McMahon, who used to campaign for the Committee to Free Flamborough.

"It's reigniting the anger."

Slot revenue vote

Council will vote tonight on whether to ratify their decision on how to spend \$4 million in slot revenue. Here's how they voted on Monday:

1. Give the existing subsidy to Flamborough and Ancaster this year, then phase it out from Flamborough over three years. Ancaster is out after this year.

Yes: Bratina, Jackson, McCarthy Pasuta, Powers

No: Clark, Collins, Duvall, Ferguson, McHattie, Morelli, Merulla, Mitchell, Pearson, Whitehead, Eisenberger

2. Cut the subsidy immediately and share slots revenue across the city.

Yes: Clark, Collins, Duvall, Jackson, McHattie, Morelli, Merulla, Pearson, Whitehead

No: Bratina, Ferguson, McCarthy, Pasuta, Mitchell, Powers, Eisenberger

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Join the debate about slot revenue at Hallmarks, the city hall blog.

<http://www.thespec.com/News/Local/article/358546>