

A taxing situation

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Councillors in Hamilton's city core just don't get it. No matter how many times Flamborough councillors point out that Flamborough is a unique and distinct part of the "new" city (after all, it's only been seven years since amalgamation), most councillors seem oblivious to the message.

About half of Flamborough's population lives in rural settings. They don't get or expect - many don't even want - the same level of municipal services that their city counterparts enjoy.

While Waterdown, with its urban core and growing population, is a bit of an exception, it too retains a small town persona that unfortunately is eroding.

This all leads to one very important three-pronged message to city councillors. First, don't take the Flamboro Slots money from Flamborough and put it into the city's general revenues; second, leave area rating as is and third, abandon the crazy idea of putting parking meters in Waterdown's commercial core.

There are very good reasons why this message should be heeded. Flamborough has taken the biggest hit in municipal tax hikes since Hamilton amalgamated with its suburban municipalities. Over the past eight years, it has seen a 68 per cent tax increase.

The municipality's share of the slots revenues has been used to help ease those sharp tax hikes and there's a need to continue that arrangement. This is not about fears that the flames of de-amalgamation will be fanned. This is about being fair to an area that has suffered larger tax hikes than any other area.

The same can be argued about area rating. Under this system, property owners in Flamborough and other parts of rural Hamilton get a break in their taxes because they don't receive the same level of service in fire protection, public transit or recreational services as city dwellers. What can possibly be wrong with that? It seems abundantly fair.

What isn't fair is the call for the elimination of area rating by some councillors. If that were to happen, Flamborough's property taxes would hit double digit increases.

Some city councillors have argued that it isn't fair that downtown Hamilton has parking meters while outlying commercial cores don't. On the face of it, it's difficult to dispute that point. But consider this: parking meters aren't fair, period. There's a strong argument they shouldn't exist anywhere, including downtown Hamilton. Why not take them out? Any lost revenues to the city coffers would be more than redoubled with increased traffic to downtown businesses.

In Waterdown, in particular, there is one very good reason why parking meters should not be installed: the new big-box development at Clappison's Corners. Downtown businesses already have their hands full trying to compete with that. They don't need to have their troubles compounded by parking meters.

So, city councillors, do the right and wise thing. Which, in Flamborough's case, is going with the status quo.

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