

PARKS AND RECREATION COMMITTEE

SPECIAL MEETING RE: 2007 BUDGET

County Council Chambers
7 Broadway Street West
Tuesday, August 27, 2007
9:10 p.m.

Present: Mayor Eddy, Councillors Wheat, Schmitt, Haggart, Powell and Chambers

Staff: Fiebig, Leask, Wamstecker, Tucker, Gaukel, Ayres, Holmes and Carman

Councillor Wheat in the Chair.

2008 COMMUNITY SERVICES BUDGET

Bill Leask reviewed the staff organizational chart for full-time employees of the Parks and Recreation Division, noting that there were twenty-seven full-time employees. In response to a question, staff outlined the following part-time employees:

- five summer students in the Cemetery Division
- three summer students and eight part-time employees in the winter months at the Burford and South Dumfries Community Centres
- three summer students and ten part-time employees in the winter months at both the Syl Apps Community Centre
- there are a number of part-time staff hired to provide Recreation programs

The Parks and Recreation Staff in attendance provided a brief overview of the strengths, weaknesses and needs of their particular division. Mr. Leask noted two of the main objectives of the Parks and Recreation Department are to be proactive rather than reactive through better planning for the future and to replace the aging facilities.

Jeff Tucker, Cemetery and Landscape Co-ordinator, reviewed some of the new programs implemented in this division to improve the municipality's cemeteries. However, there are too many inactive cemeteries that have significant maintenance costs. He suggested that there is a need for additional clerical staff in the Cemetery Division, as well as cemetery software to organize new and previous cemetery records. In response to a question, Mr. Tucker advised that the renovations are now complete at the Margaret Graham Chapel.

Darin Ayres, on behalf of the Facilities and Parks Managers, noted the good facilities that the County has and the good rapport that has been built up with the users of these facilities, community service organizations and volunteers. However, the current staff is faced with increased stress and fatigue due to their heavy workload, and any increase in additional parks and facilities to meet the needs of the growing population will only add to this problem. In addition to increasing uncontrollable costs (utilities, insurance, salaries, fringe benefits, etc.), the Facilities and Parks Division requires more resources for staffing and to address maintenance and upgrades to aging facilities and mechanical systems. In particular, a decision needs to be made on the future uses of the Syl Apps Community Centre so that the building needs can be addressed accordingly. Councillor Wheat commended the Facilities and Parks Division staff for their hard work to maintain the County's parks and facilities in a safe and efficient manner. In the area of Property and Building Management, the need to be proactive, rather than reactive, with the maintenance of buildings was highlighted.

Bill Leask reviewed the Recreation Programs Division report, noting the County's well-trained staff and use of volunteers as a strength. This Division researches, evaluates and implements programs to meet the needs of the community. The partnerships with various affiliated groups throughout the County enhances the ability to offer programs. The possibility of adding an additional Co-ordinator to complement and enhance the existing Programs Division is being investigated. Needs identified in the Recreation Programs Division include improved marketing, replacement of an aging pool, and programming limitations due to availability of facility space and storage.

The Committee reviewed a report on the Cost Comparison of Uncontrollable Costs in the Parks and Recreation Department based on costs in 2001 and 2006. This report indicates that these costs have increased from 59% of the total budget in 2001 to 68% of the total budget in 2006.

Rick Fiebig, C.A.O., briefly reviewed his report providing a budget analysis comparing 2001 and 2006 for the Parks and Recreation Department in relation to other County services. In a comparison of the 2001 and 2006 gross expenditures for tax-supported services, Parks and Recreation increased by 37%, while the average of the other services as 20%. The average increase in net operating expenditures for County services was 35%, with Parks and Recreation at 25%. In addition, a concerted effort has been made to increase user fees for Parks and Recreation and Cemeteries at a higher rate than the operating costs.

The amount of tax dollars spent on Parks and Recreation has remained at 5% of the municipal tax dollar from 2001 to 2006. Mr. Fiebig also provided a comparison of per capita costs for Parks, Recreation Programs and Recreation Facilities with other municipalities. This comparison shows that Brant spends as much or more on the operation of recreation facilities, but the lowest amount on the maintenance of parks and the second to lowest amount on recreation programming. This indicates that Brant is adequately funding for the operation of recreational facilities, but not for programs and parks. He noted the pressures on existing staff to maintain facilities and parks and provide more recreational programming. It is important that Council reviews the Parks and Recreation needs in relation to other funding priorities within the municipality.

The Committee members discussed the information that had been provided and made the following comments:

- user fees should be reviewed at budget time in comparison with operating costs
- education of the ratepayers is important so that they can understand the rationale for increasing funding to Parks and Recreation
- it would be helpful to see a comparison of costs with other municipalities that are more rural in nature
- need to develop a three-year plan for improvements to the overall Department, which would build on the current strengths including increased staffing and funding to meet the needs of growth
- suggestion that the share of the municipal tax dollar allocated for Parks and Recreation should increase in 2008 by 1%

CORRESPONDENCE

1. Investing in People and Communities through Parks and Recreation – questions for Provincial candidates from Parks and Recreation Ontario.

The meeting adjourned at 10:25 p.m. to meet again on Tuesday, October 30 at 7 p.m. in the Council Chambers, Paris.

Secretary