

Costs of new Admin centre dominate budget consultation

By Kira Wronska Dorward

The cost of New Tecumseth's new administrative building dominated discussions as residents gathered last week to sound off on the 2019 Budget.

The seats reserved for the public were mostly filled, as residents of New Tecumseth were eager to express their thoughts and views on the matters presented. First up on the docket was a resident named Janice, who expressed her extreme concern about the cost to the public over the new administration building (\$15 million).

She cited numerous statistics, including the \$666 billion of federal debt, \$302 billion of provincial debt, that represents \$18,000 of debt for each Canadian. She raised her concern over the tax burden created over generations, and how baby-boomers and millennials were not paying their fair share, with the majority of the burden to be carried by the generation born past 2005.

The grandkids of baby-boomers will not fare well, she summed up ominously.

She claimed that the building of the new administration building will generate 40 years of financial burden to the Town, and that the costs of services to the community such as the use of parks and facilities to offset this project was a nickel and dime approach.

I am appalled that no other options were explored [with how to fund the Administration Building] again, this is fiscally irresponsible to the Town future generations will look back with condemnation of this decision.

A gentleman from Alliston voiced his disagreement with the decision to fund the Administration Building with taxpayer money, asking why Council didn't look at more palatable options and that the project is becoming a money pit. We know it's not the end. It's going to be more than that [\$15 million]. We have to take a step back and have another look.

Janice asked about the consultation process with the public in the creation of this budget, and the transparency of the report presented to Council, which the Chair was forced to admit was an internal report on tax cuts and administration not available to the public.

She did emphasize that

there was an entire consultation process with building architect in a public forum where the public had an opportunity to air their concerns on May 17, 2018. She also added the necessity of debt, citing the provincial monitoring plan of municipal debts.

An 84-year-old Alliston resident took the podium, arguing "what you have here today has been bought with debt in the past."

She expressed her incredulity that other citizens did not recognize the immediate need for a new administration building.

"We need to create an area where one can support another. I can't even believe it! People are sitting on top of each other [in the current municipal building]. And it's just inadequate for a growing town."

Other concerns raised by the community had to do with funding of specific groups and institutions.

Paul Glass of the Alliston Legion 271 and his Commander were there in full uniform to bring their request for funds for a new roof. Having already done some fundraising, the Legion is asking for a \$25,000 grant to complete the project.

His Commander approached the podium and emphasized that the Legion is not just for veterans, but serves the community in many ways, and especially youth and seniors.

The Alliston Legion 271 zone consists of twelve legions, and the membership parameters include the children of veterans.

"We're more than beer and bingo," she said, "and we're open and active the other eleven months of the year as well [apart from November]."

She went on to list the numerous services the Legion provides to the community, including sponsoring and annual public speaking competition, track and field athletes (including Olympians), cadet corps and camps for youth at no cost.

There is also a bursary program in Alliston for higher education, provided one is the child or grandchild of a veteran.

In sum, the Legion 271 is an integral part of the Alliston community, and needs help from Council with repairing its roof.

A representative from the Gibson Centre also formally requested a \$40,000 grant as an increase to the funding already received from Council. She called the Gibson Centre "the gem of New Tecumseth which remains a beacon, rich in heritage and alive in culture."

A farmer from the further reaches of the municipality voiced the sentiments of "those below the 14th Line who feel like second-class citizens."

"This important project [the budget for the Administrative Building] needs to be reassessed because of how it's going to change the Town."

He cited the 3.5% salary increase Councillors had approved for themselves, while a senior such as himself had to be content with the 1.7% income increase from the federal government. He also addressed the vehicles or "trucks" as he termed them that Councillors use, and whether they are being taxed on that use.

This gentleman presented his arguments with obvious emotion, but he was shortly overshadowed by an incensed woman from Tottenham who began to question Council on what they were doing to address water quality in New Tecumseh.

"It's quality of water, not quantity," she began. "If you guys can get a raise each year, and raise the price of my water and other crap, fix it," she said, referring to the water situation. "Children are taking baths in brown water. Does your administration centre matter more than our water? When you deny us the basic essence of life of humans on this planet, there's not going to be any respect

[for you]

," she admonished. "We need clean water, not a percentage from Collingwood," she concluded to applause from the audience.

The public portion of the meeting adjourned at 8:25 pm.