

Our two cents

Going backwards to go forward? Hm.

There was a story we published in last week's paper that stuck in our craw a bit, but we thought we'd sit with it awhile, look at it from all angles, really figure out how we felt about it before coming to any kind of a real feel for the situation. That story was "Uxbridge council receives a pay raise," on page 6, in case you're looking for it.

We decided that we felt 'unsettled' about the fact that the mayor had decided to give all council positions an approximately 10-11 per cent increase in remuneration. But we weren't sure *why* we felt that way. After all, Mayor Barton's argument that the pay for being on council should make people *want* to run for public office was sound. No one will want to do it if it's endless hours, total usurpation of personal time, *and* crummy pay. Like he said during the council meeting that announced the raises, no one should be acclaimed to council, it means there's something wrong. More money might make it more appealing, especially with today's cost of living crisis.

Therein lies the rub. How, in today's economic climate, can a council justify that large of an increase? During the same meeting mentioned earlier, the mayor said that these increases should have happened during the term of the last council (upon which he and many other current council members sat), but COVID and the tornado and all kinds of things got in the way and it "felt like it would be selfish then for us to be talking about our wages." It seems a bit selfish now, too. Everyone one needs more money right now - how lucky that council can just vote for an increase. The rest of us have to grovel to a boss, or wait for collective bargaining.

What really made for that unsettled feeling, however, was the fact that these increases are all retroactive to November 2022. How does that wash? In his explanation, Barton (who created the report and said that he alone crunched the numbers, with some help from CAO Kristi Honey) said that his vision was for the next term, all part of succession planning, but that it meant the current council "wouldn't have been compensated appropriately." That just doesn't compute. To have the increases come into effect now, when there are still two years left for this council, and have salaries increase in sync with township staff and management increases is digestible, manageable. But to be retroactive just because the last council didn't get around to doing something about succession planning? At the end of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, Ebenezer Scrooge, who has chosen to live more generously, gives his clerk, Bob Cratchit, a raise in salary *going forward*. Notice he doesn't say "I've made a right mess of it all for the past 10 years, Bob, so I'll make your raise retroactive..."

Considering that many of the councillors at last Monday's meeting claimed they hadn't known what the going rate was in the township for a council position when they threw their hat in the ring, the mayor included, they mustn't have taken on the job to alleviate financial suffering. And we firmly believe that every heart in that council chamber is in the right place - they took the job on because they truly care about their community, they want to make a difference in their community, and they are willing to give the time and energy to it. We wouldn't want the job for love nor money. But we feel that the retroactive raise sets a dangerous precedent. Who wouldn't want to run for council if the possibility of a retroactive raise is ever-present. Nice work, if you can get it.

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Publisher/Editor: Lisha Van Nieuwenhove 905-852-1900
Advertising/Sales: 905-852-1900

38 Toronto Street North, Unit One, Uxbridge Ontario L9P 1E6
E-mail: Lvann@thecosmos.ca Website: Thecosmos.ca

Office Hours: Monday - Thursday 9:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m., Friday to 4 p.m.

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Letters to the Editor

Re: Council remuneration, April 18 edition

Councils, both regional and municipal, now have the ability to run somewhat under the radar with the demise of local newspapers/reporters. At one time we had three reporters sitting at every council meeting locally, and five or six at the region. We in Uxbridge are fortunate to still have a local newspaper.

Reading the April 18 edition of *Cosmos*, I was appalled to learn the actions of council regarding their remuneration. I know first hand how difficult it can be to deal with this matter, having sat on council for over 30 years. However, in my opinion, their actions are an insult to every taxpayer in our municipality.

Mayor Barton presented a four-page report to council members last week regarding succession planning and council remuneration. The report recommended:

1. A 10 per cent increase in salaries for all members – mayor will receive \$53,811, an increase of \$5,604. Councillors' salaries increased \$3,497, from \$31,268 to \$34,765.
2. A \$1,107 increase for the chair of the Finance committee, from \$2,743 to \$3,850.
3. A 100 per cent increase for Public Works, Planning and Administration committee chairs from \$1,920 to \$3,850.
4. A \$944 increase for the chairs of the Parks and Environment committees from \$1,920. to \$2,864.
5. The position of deputy mayor will be compensated at the rate of \$400 per month and will be a rotated yearly appointment of sitting members.

6. A monthly mileage allowance for the mayor and regional councillor and rural ward 1 and 2 councillors of \$575 each, and \$425 each for ward 3, 4 and 5 councillors.

If that wasn't enough, it is all RETROACTIVE TO NOVEMBER 2022. That is unconscionable.

The report then goes on to state "The annual remuneration..... shall be automatically adjusted to reflect the same economic percentage salary adjustments that may be granted to the full-time non-union salaried staff group, with the same effective dates (which takes place on April 1st of each year)."

This is a direct reflection taken from Bylaw 70-2023 Durham Region.

So now council's remuneration is linked to staff/management as opposed to the CUPE Agreement for the outside workers which was normally from one to three per cent.

The report also states "No changes are currently proposed to the Township's benefits plan; however, the Township's benefit program may be changed and or amended from time to time over the term of council..." Will we the taxpayers be advised of any changes?

Let's not forget that additional remuneration is received by the mayor and regional councillor from Durham Region. Last year, Mayor Barton's regional remuneration was \$67,212 (conferences not included), along with Lake Simcoe and Toronto Region Conservation Authorities stipend of \$1,479. Add this to the Township remuneration stated above and it amounts to \$133,253 (mileage included but not conferences).

Regional councillor Bruce Garrod received \$61,661 (conferences not included) from Durham Region and \$1,126 from Lake Simcoe Conservation. Add this to the Township remuneration just passed for a total compensation package worth \$108,302 (mileage included not conferences).

I, along with most people, do not object to fair compensation. Uxbridge Township mayor and councillors have always, in my humble opinion, been treated fairly and equitably. The actions of this council in today's environment cannot be justified.

Gerri Lynn O'Connor
Uxbridge

In response to the *Cosmos* article regarding pay increases of 11.62 per cent, retroactive from 2022 for the council and the mayor, I find it interesting this is being pushed through at this time.

I agree that we are blessed to have these people on council and am sure this a calling for many in public service.

In a recent council meeting there were at least three members, including the mayor, who said they had no idea what their position paid. I have never heard a person say this before...maybe it's just me, but I find it remarkable that they had no idea.

If we take the council and the mayor on their word that they had no idea how much they would be paid, then why is this a concern now if it wasn't initially?

As the council and mayor had mentioned during their meeting,

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