

Request for Decision United Townships of Head, Clara & Maria Council

Type of Decision									
Meeting Date	Friday, March 28, 2014				Report Date	Tuesday, February-11-14			
Decision Required	X	Yes		No	Priority	X	High		Low
Direction	X	Information Only			Type of Meeting	X	Open		Closed

#23/05/14/1206 – Staffing Proposal

Subject:

Options for consideration to improve staffing to alleviate work load on current staff and provide for eventual succession planning and cross training.

RECOMMENDATION:

That Council authorize staff to implement the following strategies to assist with providing a lighter workload, allowing staff to take and enjoy hard earned vacation and holidays without workloads piling ever higher and to continue to provide the excellent customer service that our residents, ratepayers and Council members deserve and expect.

WHEREAS increased workload, a large portion downloaded by the Provincial government, has increased the demand on employees' time increasing workplace stress due to conflicting demands;

AND WHEREAS volumes of research has shown that individuals working under constant stress do not perform as efficiently or effectively;

AND WHEREAS amendments to the current workplace and organizational structure could resolve in a cost effective measure current and future staffing issues;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Council of the United Townships of Head, Clara & Maria does hereby agree to:

1. begin to close the municipal office, not answer phones or email for one day per week to allow for uninterrupted periods of work for as long as necessary to become caught up in backlog of work;
2. continue to allow staff to work from home on an as needed basis to provide for uninterrupted work periods;
3. agree to increase the hours of the office administrative assistant by one day per week beginning immediately;
4. agree, upon the announcement of retirement of the incumbent, to fill the office assistant position by hiring for a four day week providing for in-house training and succession planning.

BACKGROUND/EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The above resolution provides solutions to alleviate current time demands, makes use of skills and knowledge of current employees, and provides for eventual succession planning for the Office Admin position and eventually the Treasurer and Clerk positions. It considers both short term and long term solutions to the current issue as well as succession planning focusing on cost effective methods.

“Review staffing needs and opportunities” was ranked #7 following the Strategic Planning exercise held in 2013. The challenge is that with staff overworked, many of the other items on the Strategic Planning list are not receiving the attention they deserve.

Needs fulfilled in implementing the above resolution:

1. reduce load on current staff;
2. time freed to focus on other task which have a better return for the community such as additional grant funding, sharing tasks and services with other communities, or streamlining current operations;
3. reduce stress, resulting in improved performance, increased productivity, reduced illness;
4. provides for succession planning;
5. hiring from within, reduces costs of hiring and training and succession;
6. provides available staff to fill in vacation, illness etc.;

Continuous downloads from the province have resulted in staff being faced with an ever increasing workload while hours worked or staffing do not increase. Demands have continued so that staff are feeling overwhelmed with the amount of work required. As needs change/demands increase in the future, we will be in a better position to adapt.

As for increased staffing for HCM, even though staff and Council work diligently to accurately forecast revenues and expenses annually, it is true that we have been operating at an annual surplus of well over \$15,000 in each of the last 6 years except for 2009.

Additionally, a third staff member would allow for a continued presence in the office during vacation and/or illness. When combining positions, there are as many as 27 days of vacation owing for 2014, not including Time for Time which currently amounts to an additional 15 days. That means there are at least 42 days where work will not be completed for 2014 simply due to earned leave. Sick days have not been included.

We considered and investigated the use of volunteers to assist in routine tasks however; recently the province has been clamping down on what they term “unpaid internships” specifically in the municipal sector. We have made use of high school students who are required to complete their 40 hours of volunteer service prior to graduation. We do have two students slated for some tasks this summer.

By increasing the hours for the office assistant position, we immediately increase actual work time since Gayle is already familiar with operations; neither Noella nor I would need time to train. Within a few years, Gayle will be in a position to retire and would then be able to train her replacement. A replacement could be hired for a two day week term for a short period – 2-3 months during which time Gayle could train the trainee. Upon Gayle's retirement the new hire would work a four day work week.

This person would be eventually trained to fill in for and/or assist the Clerk and Treasurer and would provide continuity of operations during eventual staff turnover or long term illness.

Succession planning in this manner will be an advantage and a cost savings as we are training in-house as opposed to hiring from the external market where salaries and benefit packages in other municipalities are significantly higher than those in Head, Clara & Maria.

RATIONALE

Much work is new and has been recently downloaded however it also holds true that some tasks were overlooked in past years and staff have to also catch up on those issues. Two major jobs in this category include records management and retention and policy and by-law review. Records

were stored but were not appropriately catalogued or sorted. Gayle has been working on this project for many months and is nearing completion however; many hours have gone into sorting through old files, eliminating boxes and boxes of unnecessary documents. Once completed, she will be available to complete routine tasks for the Clerk and Treasurer as well as provide Receptionist duties.

By-laws and policies require annual review. Time does not allow for this to occur. Over the past decades, policies and by-laws were created to resolve one-off situations, often with no reference to applicable legislation. Many still need review and updating; being unenforceable in their current form.

In 2006 with the new Municipal Act coming into force an additional list of policies/by-laws were required. Additionally other legislation is being passed placing additional demands on staff.

These include: Procedure By-law; sale and other disposition of land; hiring of employees; procurement of goods and services; notice by-law; accountability and transparency by-law; delegation of its powers and duties, Codes of Conduct and Harassment and Violence policies. These policies/by-laws now need to be followed, reviewed and updated annually. They have been created and followed by staff however; we have not reviewed them since implementation due to time constraints.

When Council wishes to support a resolution or circulate a resolution for support that means that each letter must be copied or printed numerous times, current ministers, ministry's and addresses verified and printed, copies of resolutions created and all either mailed, faxed or scanned and emailed. These tasks are time consuming and once the initial letter has been printed and signed; could be delegated to another person to complete. Current hours do not allow for that so the Clerk spends many hours completing these tasks. After the March meeting – one entire day was spent completing this process, eventually mailing 80 letters and emailing/faxing 30 others.

This day might have been better spent researching and completing the new Ontario grant application for seniors funding which is still awaiting attention.

To put the demands on staff into perspective, we have all gotten to the point where we no longer take breaks, and eat lunch at our desks while completing some other task. The items on our to-do lists do not allow for “sitting” while we have so much to do.

It may be argued that many of these requirements are not appropriate for a municipality of our size however; it has been shown that we do need to comply with legislation to be prepared to defend decisions and actions should we ever be legally challenged in the future. Complaints made against staff and Council in years past were successfully defended due to our compliance with our policies and by-laws as well as adherence to accountability and transparency rules. We do need to be prepared as we never know when we will be challenged and by whom.

Further, the province has initiated various penalties up to and including threat of personal fines should compliance not occur. Annual funding in the form of the Ontario Municipal Partnership Fund (and its successor) as well as special funding in one-off grants may be withheld should compliance not occur. Non-compliance with some legislated responsibilities could result in personal jail time.

It is agreed that small municipalities such as ours can ill afford increased staffing simply to meet provincial demands however; we exist at the will of the province. Non-compliance might have serious consequences up to and including forced amalgamations, depending on the government of the day.

It is staff position that a public unified protest with similarly sized municipalities, however futile in appearance, is the best option for affecting any long term change and encourages advances in that direction.

Options/Discussion:

OPTION	PROS	CONS	COST	OTHER
Status Quo	No increased cost to municipality.	Staff burn out. Erosion of quality of work due to interruptions and increased volume of tasks. No succession planning. Interruption of operations during vacations/illness.	None	
Office closed one day per week	Allows for uninterrupted work time to focus on tasks requiring attention. Increased productivity.	Some inconvenience to public. People may still knock on doors knowing that someone is in the office.	None	Inconveniences may be reduced by well-placed advertising and signage as well as using the same day each week.
Work from home	Allows for uninterrupted work time to focus on tasks.	Absence from office leaves the other person having to communicate to answer questions, delaying response time.	None. Costs of bandwidth personal internet service.	
Closed door Policy	Can work to achieve some uninterrupted work periods.	Due to thin walls, interruptions occur whether doors are closed or not. A receptionist position is still required for phones, drop ins.		
Time Management Techniques			Usually some cost with webinars or training.	Have been utilized and incorporated in these suggestions. Perhaps a webinar session might help individually. We will look to see if anything is offered through various

				associations we belong to.
<p>Email off and only checked occasionally.</p> <p>Phones left to answering machine and checked occasionally.</p>	Allows for periods of uninterrupted work.	Urgent emails or phone calls may go unnoticed for hours at a time.	None	<p>This method will be implement for segmented times during the day.</p> <p>Emails are checked then shut off for a couple of hours.</p> <p>We will switch who will answer phones on an alternating basis so the task is not always left to the same person.</p>
Volunteers	Unpaid workforce.	<p>Unpaid internship?</p> <p>Students not qualified for some tasks. Time spent to train not worth the return.</p> <p>Not willing to complete some tedious but necessary tasks such as shredding files.</p>	None	Adult volunteers are considered "unpaid interns" and are not legal.
<p>Increased Staffing</p> <p>Increase the office admin assistant by one day or more for a short period.</p> <p>Closer to retirement date hire for an eventual four day position as we did with the Treasurer's position.</p>	<p>Have a partially trained individual to work additional time NOW.</p> <p>Have the benefit of having Gayle train her replacement prior to retirement.</p> <p>Hiring from within is less expensive than recruiting a qualified individual from elsewhere.</p>	With hiring laws it will still be difficult to hire a "younger" person to ensure succession planning; although there are never any guarantees in how long a person will stay at any position.		

Financial Considerations/Budget Impact:

1. Costs of additional 7 hours at Office Admin Assistant wage. \$7,000 - \$7,700 per year. Easily absorbed in current surplus.
2. After increasing to a 4 day per week position, the total annual cost, in today's dollars, would be \$27,711 - \$30,776. An increase from current costs of approximately \$23,000. This increase would not occur for some time.

3. Annual increases to revenues from the increased assessments being phased in over 4 years amount to \$13,000 additional revenue per year which may be used to offset this increased cost.
4. \$6,752 is in the Succession Planning reserve fund to assist with costs of training which may be utilized when training the new hire.

Policy Impact:

Creates new policy as it increases current staffing levels.

Others Consulted/Resources:

Noella LeBreton – Treasurer;
Mike Larocque – Instructor EDMM course;
Marlene Gibson – Library Board Chair;
Gayle Watters – Office Admin Assistant;

Approved and Recommended by the Clerk
Melinda Reith, Municipal Clerk

Additional resources:

THE REALITY OF THE TAX RATE

By Mike Larocque, Consultant/Trainer for AMCTO, CAO/Clerk and Treasurer – retired.

When people enter the field of governance at a Council level or a Board or a Committee they are under pressure and criticism of the constituents to keep the tax rate down. Sometimes the citizens blame the bureaucracy, touting them as overpaid and underworked. In reacting to this some Councillors may lose sight of the whole picture and total range of their responsibilities and seem to think that reducing and or not providing sufficient staff is a solution. They seem to think that the tax rate is their only responsibility.

Insufficiency and inadequacy of staff is never a practical solution because the public still want service and the Province still requires compliance. Also, Councillors themselves want compliance and implementation of their own rules and want to be protected from not meeting their responsibilities.

Council has a responsibility to provide service, to communicate and inform and to comply with the laws of the land.

There is a silent download for the need of staff.

Over the past five or six years, the Provincial Government has been strengthening how municipal government should work. Besides providing the ability for Municipalities to operate under natural persons powers over several spheres of jurisdiction they have implemented new policies and legislations. Some of these are:

- Required hiring policies and human resource management practices.
- Required harassment and work place policies and monitoring.
- Required Occupational Health and safety committees, practices and meetings.
- Road surveillance and monitoring. Minimum Maintenance Levels.
- Required purchasing policies and processes and the monitoring thereof.
- Required PSAB (Public Service Accounting Board Practices).
- Required social and cultural services
- Sustainable Infrastructure Sustainability programs and the monitoring thereof.
- Required Asset Management Program Models and a Finance Plan.
- Required Accessibility standards and facilities access.
- Required Emergency Management Programs, monitoring and exercises.
- Required project management and reporting models for subsidy drawdown (provincial funding).
- Compliance with monitoring for the Safe Small Drinking Waters Act.
- Meetings monitoring and compliance.
- Freedom of Information Act.
- Transparency, Accountability, Communications monitoring.

All of these download to strengthen and make local government more sophisticated bring with it a silent but obvious download for the need of staff.

A number of municipalities have recognized this responsibility and have hired staff for their Finance and Administrations department. Municipalities are hiring Integrity Auditors and Communications Officers as well. These are inevitable costs that will increase the tax rate.

On the other hand there are some Councillors and some candidates who think keeping the tax rate down is the only objective and are willing to trade off the necessary implementation of these activities. This seems unrealistic and in the long run will have repercussions on the ability to serve, to comply and maintain staff.

Besides having a responsibility to manage the tax rate, Council also has the responsibility to provide Service, and to adequately staff the municipality, its Boards and committees in their charge. Council's responsibility is to balance all of these things.

The tools for balancing all that has to be managed are:

- Right sized staffing - Sufficiency and competency
- Controlling out of line spiraling salary and benefit - Costs of certain sectors.
- Solid processes and structure and practices that allow the municipalities' responsibilities to be conducted in an effective and efficient manner.
- Structured "Needs Identification" and "Prioritization Processes".
- Knowledge, understanding by members of Council along with continual training and development of staff.
- A sincere, mature, and ongoing process for strengthening Council and staff relationships.
- To ensure an administration that understands and knows how to set up and implement these tools.