

FIRST PUBLIC MEETING
PROPOSED LOCAL SERVICES BOARD FOR GIDLEY, PELLATT, PELICAN & UMBACH
June 16, 2010

The meeting was called to order by the chairman Barry Baltessen at 7 p.m. at the Pellatt Community Club with 50 people in attendance. Copies of an information brochure, a financial projection, information on the formation and operation of a Local Services Board, along with the Local Services Board Act were made available.

B. Baltessen provided an overview of why the formation of a Local Services Board was being pursued as a funding mechanism for fire protection in the area. Fire protection is currently provided by the Pellatt United Fire Fighters (PUFF), who would be contracted to provide this service if an LSB were formed. The current method of requesting a contribution from each property has proven inadequate with less than half of the properties contributing. A Local Services Board would ensure equitable contributions from all property owners who benefit from fire protection services. In addition, volunteer time spent on fundraising activities could be shifted to operational issues. Finally, a Local Services Board would be eligible to apply for government grants. The area affected by this proposal is the townships of Gidley, Pellatt, Pelican and Umbach. The boundaries are defined by the Winnipeg River on the east side, the CPR tracks on the south side, and township boundaries on the north and west side. A financial projection was presented indicating that the LSB fire protection levy could likely be maintained at or below the current PUFF contribution request of \$80 for a residential property and \$100 for a commercial property. B. Baltessen explained that this was the first of two information meetings, with a second meeting on Saturday, July 17 to allow seasonal residents an opportunity to attend.

Theresa Stephens, Northern Development Advisor for the Ministry of Northern Development, Mines and Forestry, was introduced and presented information about the formation and operation of a Local Services Board.

A question and answer session followed.

1. Ralph Webb asked how long the process to establish an LSB would take once the vote was completed. He was advised that the best case scenario would be by the fall of 2011 for the 2012 fiscal year.
2. Brian Lenchuk asked if an American property owner could vote. He was told that they cannot, only Canadian citizens are eligible to vote.

3. Murray Brueckner asked about the estimate of costs associated with administration of the LSB. He was told that the financial projection reflects the anticipated cost of an audit, liability insurance for the board and a possible honorarium for a recording secretary. Mr. Brueckner then asked if there would be additional costs added later and was advised that this was not the intention. He was reminded that all costs in the budget and the annual levy would have to be voted on at a public meeting.
4. Brian Grieder asked if there were any other Local Service Boards. He was told there are many including the LSB that is being pursued for McKenzie Clearwater. He also wondered if board members would be paid, but was assured that according to the Act they cannot be paid.
5. Jim Todd asked for further clarification about the costs associated with the LSB. He was told they were our best estimate of the costs based on discussions with other LSBs. He felt the audit was costly. He was advised that the estimate had come from the Minaki LSB and it was recognized that the Minaki LSB has responsibility for more than fire protection.
6. Jim Todd asked about the process for collection of the levy and who does it. Ken Pride advised that the Minister of Finance would collect the funds through its agent, the City of Thunder Bay.
7. Murray Brueckner asked if there were any existing plans to pay the volunteer fire fighters or members of the PUFF Board. He was assured that there are no current discussions and the current group of volunteers are satisfied with the existing system of volunteering their time with no remuneration. Murray was reminded that if this idea was brought forward in the future, the costs and impact on the levy would require a vote and approval at a public meeting.
8. Joyce Chevrier asked about the board make up and how long people can hold a position. She was advised that there can be either 3 or 5 board members and there are no restrictions as to how long a person can hold a position, but the terms are one year and are voted on at an annual public meeting.
9. Ross Kilberry asked if this LSB was looking to contract any other services besides fire protection. He was advised that the only service being requested at this time is fire protection.

10. Alexis Peplinski asked if Emergency First Response costs are included in the financial projection. She was informed that the costs in the financial projection were for fire protection only.
11. Brian Grieder asked if we would then be asking for donations for EFR. He was advised that the EFR service would be funded from other revenue and that PUFF did not contemplate sending out a specific request for EFR contributions.
12. Murray Brueckner asked why the separation and was told they were covered by different government departments. Clarification was required for how EFR would be funded. Brueckner asked about how shortfalls for the EFR team would be funded. He was advised that fundraising efforts by PUFF may be required.
13. Ross Kilberry asked for clarification regarding how the amount of the levy is determined. He was advised that the levy would be calculated by dividing the fire protection costs submitted to the LSB by PUFF by the number of properties. The annual levy would be subject to a vote by residents at an annual meeting.
14. Pat Moeller clarified that currently there is funding from the Kenora District Services Board of \$5,000 per year (although it has to be requested), for purchases of EFR equipment and training. She added that the people who provide EFR services are all members of the fire team.
15. Murray Brueckner said it is more important to him to know there is a first response team. He was assured that if the fire hall was viable, the EFR team would continue as well. Fred Moeller tried to help clarify the questions of EFR funding. Murray Brueckner was very concerned that EFR could be in bad shape in 5 or 10 years. He was assured that the EFR team has been managing for years and could continue to do so as long as the fire hall is in operation.
16. Cameron Hagen clarified that the EFR team would benefit by having to spend less time fund raising for all costs and simply focus on EFR costs. The crowd was assured that PUFF is in a good financial position at this time.

17. Ross Kilberry also reminded attendees that presently, due to privacy concerns, PUFF has no mechanism to stay on top of property sales. When requests for contributions are sent out, they are only sent to the properties where the owner is known, missing all those who have just moved in or where property has changed hands. This limits PUFF's ability to request donations from all residents served.
18. Charlie Hooper asked about similarities between the LSB and the roads boards in terms of a contingency fund while waiting for funds to be remitted from the province. He was informed that PUFF has been in business since 1981 and is a solvent organization with an operating cash flow that should be able to handle the transition from contribution funding to an LSB levy. If there was a cash shortfall, PUFF would continue with its current fund-raising activities to finance operations until the levy was received.
19. Alexis Peplinski asked about the transition from the current funding method to an LSB levy, with a concern that there might be either a period with no funding or a period with double charges. She was assured that there would be an appropriate transition plan in place. She also asked how many properties are covered and was advised that while the exact number of properties is unknown, PUFF currently sends requests for contributions to 950 properties.
20. Nancy Hooper asked if a quorum was required at the annual public meeting. She was advised that those who show up can vote. No quorum is necessary as long as the meetings are advertised and posted according to the Act.
21. Murray Brueckner asked how to ensure people who show up are eligible to vote. He was advised that voting methods would be determined by the committee. If people do not show up on voting day, they don't get to vote. Voters are inhabitants, 18 or over and Canadian citizens. Any individual's right to vote can be challenged and they can be asked to sign an affidavit. There is one vote per inhabitant, so some households will have more than one voter.

22. Grant Hayton then addressed the crowd to go over the budget in more detail. He praised the transparency and fairness of the process. He clarified that PUFF was set up as a not-for-profit corporation and that last year it had achieved a charitable donation status so that tax receipts were issued for paid contributions. Under the LSB funding mechanism, this would not be available to contributors unless the amount given exceeds the set levy and is paid directly to PUFF as a voluntary contribution. He informed those present that he had prepared a separate budget showing that the retained earnings to cover capital expenditures may not be adequate for the anticipated equipment replacements and building upgrades that could be required.
23. Jim Johnson spoke to Grant's concerns, commending him for putting forward worst case scenario budget projections to address risk concerns. Under Grant's direction as treasurer, more money was set aside in reserve than in previous years. Over the next 15 years it is likely that each vehicle will need replacing and Jim said PUFF is planning for that.
24. Evelyn Lenchuk said that everyone is interested in a viable fire department and she supports the idea of the LSB, further stating that she is tired of carrying her neighbours. She recognized the risks but added that the risks are there with or without the LSB and perhaps the fire department would be better able to address the risks with financing for fire protection provided through an LSB. She was applauded and similar sentiments were expressed by others in the crowd. Pat Moeller said the LSB would be a win/win with the positives far outweighing the negatives.
25. Irene Nelson spoke in favour of an equitable way to fund fire protection. She said they are stretched too thin to continue struggling for ways to fund the department. She also received applause.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 p.m.