

Council to take another crack at compensation

By Brock Weir

They rejected it with the stroke of a pen, but Councillors are set to take a more thorough look at compensation for the next crop of Mayor and Councillors on Tuesday.

The decision to take a second look came when Council last met on February 26, following a notice of reconsideration from Councillor Michael Thompson. Council, he said, was too hasty in simply receiving the recommendations that came forward from the Council Compensation Ad Hoc Committee in January before Council consideration early last month.

?Back in 2011, Councillor Gaertner put forward a motion that we move the ball forward and we all approved that, we set up a committee, we [engaged the public and] they gave up their time and put tremendous effort into it.? said Councillor Michael Thompson on the establishment of the committee tasked to review the salaries and benefits enjoyed by the Mayor and Council.

Councils typically establish such a committee to review salaries for the term of Council that will succeed them rather than ultimately having the potential to give themselves pay raises.

?They came up with a report with a number of recommendations and we never even debated those recommendations.? continued Councillor Thompson. ?We received a report, but we did nothing more. Whether you agree with it, or you don't, I think the fair thing is to bring that matter back, put those recommendations on the floor, and then we debate the individual ones and you vote as you see fit.

?I just think we didn't give that report a fair shake and it deserves to come back in its entirety for us to have that discussion.?

The Compensation Committee's recommendations held the salary for the 2014-2018 term of Council static at what it is today, but recommended a \$9,000 pay increase to whoever wears the mayoral chains during that Council term to bring that position more in line with his or her counterparts in other nearby municipalities.

Today's Councillors receive a base salary of \$29,000 plus compensation for costs in the line of duty. Mayor Geoffrey Dawe currently receives just over \$57,000 in annual salary from the Town, as well as \$8,000 in vehicle expenses and the use of a Blackberry. Councillors also receive a vehicle allowance of \$1,674.

Salaries for both Mayor and Council are 1/3 tax exempt.

They also recommended the Mayor's position was in need of further benefits, including long-term disability insurance. Their reasoning, said the committee, was that the Mayor's position was equivalent to that of a Chief Executive Officer in a full-time position and, as it stands now, should the person in the Mayor's seat experience a serious illness or ?catastrophe? there is no income maintenance for the office holder or their families.

The decision to merely receive rather than endorse the recommendations came at the February 12 Council meeting, a discussion which also focused on whether or not health benefits should be extended to members of Council. When Councillor Thompson made his motion to take a second kick at the can this week, however, some Councillors believed the issue had already been put to bed.

?We had a discussion, we chose to receive it and at that time chose to do something completely different.? said Councillor John Gallo. ?I don't understand why we're going to revisit it. If the point is we didn't have an opportunity to discuss it, we absolutely did.

?If the premise is to have a debate, we had an opportunity to have that debate. The whole report was on the Council agenda. If the point is we didn't have enough of debate and we want to have another debate and open it up again then that is fine, but I don't think it is necessarily fair to say it wasn't on a Council agenda and we didn't have an opportunity to vet it.?

Councillor Thompson said he would like to see the six individual recommendations put back on the floor and discussed individually and the issues ?deserve? Council's input.

?As it is right now, it just seems like it is kind of in limbo,? he said.