

Belleville City Council is not too thrilled with the Ontario Government because of recent cutbacks and downloads from Queen's Park to the municipal level that are creating financial stress for municipalities.

As far as Belleville City Council is concerned, the Ontario government is “nOntario.” Recent cutbacks and downloads from Queen's Park to the municipal level are creating financial stress for municipalities, and in one move particularly, fatal hazards from disease. And Belleville is not alone. Resolutions from other municipalities, especially in Eastern Ontario, got strong support from City Council Monday.

One concerned the cutting out of free well water testing and closing of the provincial testing laboratory. Coun. Chris Malette reminded that it was turning over the water system management at Walkerton to private enterprise that was the key factor in the famous tragedy there that led to several deaths and many painful illnesses. He also reminded that we are approaching the 25th anniversary of that Ontario tragedy and it could be repeated with the many rural dwellers relying on well systems. He reported having just attended a meeting of the Ontario Association of Conservation Authorities that that provincial decision aroused amazement, frustration and downright anger earlier Monday.

Other members of council chipped in similar concerns. Coun. Garnet Thompson said the local health unit was dismayed and deeply concerned for well users. Other concerns included rural dweller who are renting and relying on landlords to ensure safe water supply. The \$150 cost of getting private tests under the new system might well be too much for some to pay, or the tests might simply be ignored to the detriment of health for infants and children as well as seniors and all rural residents.

Resolutions on the issue came from the Township of Asphodel Norwood, contending “the closure will increase health inequities especially in most rural communities.”

Still another resolution involved downloading of busy roads to the municipal level. It came from nearby Loyalist Township calling on the provincial government to upload responsibility and costs for municipally-owned highways or increase the community infrastructure fund to “fairly and equitably allocate resources to municipalities.” It too was quickly endorsed.

Then there was a second one from Loyalist Township, which got ardent approval, calling for making producers of Blue Box disposables be responsible for end-of-life recycling produce from “all sources.”

Coun. Malette, as chair of council's Green Committee, agreed that recycle collectors have been adding products that they will no longer accept and the situation is worsening.

Other items of “new business” included an appeal for pop-ups in Zwick' Park extend their hours of operation from 7 p.m. to 8 p.m. during summer hours when the park is still active. A spokesperson for the pop-ups agreed it is not a problem operators have paid much attention to, but they will this year and consider it.

Coun. Malette reminded that it is a good idea, but getting hired help to keep extra hours is a huge problem. And one more thing: the reason Belleville and other Quinte area municipalities were turned down for federal housing assistance appears to be density concerns. Communities whose applications were accepted allow four-plex units, while Belleville and some other communities will not approve these under current planning and zoning regulations. A resolution carried calling for staff to investigate, study and make recommendations to council was promptly carried.

Don DeGenova

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