

Date: August 28th, 2023

To: Township of Tiny Mayor and Council

Tiny Township Municipal Building

In October of 2022 the residents of Tiny elected a new Council to manage the Township, the majority of whom had little or no experience with being an elected official. Although we do not want to be critical of the new Council as it works its way through its first year, we would be remiss in not pointing out some of the concerns raised by the over 300 members of our association.

We have been closely monitoring what happens at Council over the past nine (9) years in our role as the Lafontaine Area Shoreline Homeowners Association (LASHA). We have also spent considerable time reviewing and sharing with our members, the platforms of all candidates in the recent election.

The Township recently released its 2024 Annual Budget Survey for public input.

In looking back at the results of the 2023 Budget Survey we found the following:

Which statement best represents your position regarding the tax dollars you pay in Tiny?

45% support a 0% tax increase

45% support a 0-3% tax increase

10 % support a 3-5% tax increase

Long-term planning is vital for the Township of Tiny. What are the three most important items you want Council to focus on investing in long-term (5-10 years)?

A New or Improved Town Hall was supported by only 5% of the respondents.

In LASHA's poll of candidate platforms, they were asked to rate 15 issues from most to least important. Almost all candidates elected had listed new administrative offices at or near the bottom of the 15 categories.

So, it is not surprising that the announcement of an almost 12% property tax increase and moving forward with a new Town Hall caught most residents off guard. And, as the Township pushes forward with its plan to construct a new Municipal Office, we would have hoped that they would pause to consider the public reaction already put forward through deputations to Council and petitions, rather than just accepting it for information.

As well, it seems somewhat disingenuous to put out surveys requesting public input and subsequently discounting the input received.

As an association of concerned residents, we would hope that Council would pause and hear what residents are saying. The same residents that entrusted them with running our Municipality for four years.

Although it is obvious to most that the current municipal building has its issues, so does a lot of Township infrastructure. The Parks and Recreation Master Plan has identified a large number of infrastructure projects that require significant funding.

For Council to even consider moving forward with a new municipal building it needs to be aware of the big picture, notably the “infrastructure deficit”.

This topic arises annually both at budget time and on presentation of the previous years audited financial statements. Obviously, financial restraints and competing priorities create a gap between infrastructure requirements and the resources required to meet them. There have been some patchwork attempts in the past eight years to address it, such as the 1% per year investment in infrastructure, but it continues to spiral.

Tiny Township is faced with the challenge of rehabilitating or replacing significant existing infrastructure most of which was acquired over time, while at the same time, investing in new infrastructure.

However, we do not believe that the Township can fully address the issue of infrastructure deficit without a fully established Asset Management Plan (AMP). Tiny has been somewhat negligent in leaving the full development of an asset management plan until the last minute.

On January 1, 2018, Ontario Regulation 588/17: Asset Management Planning for Municipal Infrastructure came into effect. The regulation sets out requirements for municipal asset management planning to help municipalities better understand their infrastructure needs and inform infrastructure planning and investment decisions. While the regulation is being phased in over six years, municipalities needed to begin immediately to meet the required timelines. By July 1, 2024, Asset Management Plans for all municipal infrastructure assets and proposed levels of service, activities and funding required to meet those levels of service and any estimated funding shortfall must be completed.

We are aware that the Township now has an Asset Management person on staff to ensure its AMP was completed by the deadline and are pleased to see that a professional consulting firm is now being retained to this end.

The AMP is critical as Tiny will need to demonstrate to the Province that they have undertaken asset management planning - and that their grant requests are supported by their plan - in order to access provincial funding for infrastructure.

A transparent, publicly communicated AMP provides a foundation for Council and its taxpayers to understand the costs of providing services. This contributes to enhanced accountability for decision-making, opens an opportunity for council to discuss needs, priorities, and financial requirements on a more informed basis, and demonstrate that public money is being invested responsibly by showing that results are being achieved.

With respect to the new municipal building, a lot has changed since the previous Council put the project on hold. Hopefully Council and their newly resurrected Building Assessment Committee will have considered the following:

- It has been almost five years since the last building assessment report was updated and a lot has transpired since then. The original cost estimates are not only out of date, but the cost of construction has more than doubled in the last 5 years. And estimates are just that. Most contracts face change orders, delays and over runs. The end cost seldom reflects the budgeted cost.
- Increased borrowing costs are again a major factor in such a huge investment with the Bank of Canada recently raising the base to 5%.
- That for over a year the facility was closed due to Covid-19 and the majority of staff worked off-site effectively. If remote working served well during and beyond that period, has this been looked at as a potential alternative to constructing new workspace?
- Whether many of the staff could be located elsewhere. The Public Works building on the 9th Concession was designed to support construction of a second level when it was built. Has this option been reviewed? Could it not house the entire Public Works/Water staff?
- Does the Township really need to be providing space for Tatham Engineering staff?
- The Province has put Simcoe County on notice that it is being reviewed for amalgamation. What impact might this have?
- Should financial experts not be looked to for advice as a first step?

It is important for Tiny to recognize the impact of levels of service in helping to determine investment needs. Infrastructure assets are designed to provide services to the public and public demand for these services helps identify the levels of service required. As such, it seems extremely premature to be planning for such a one-off major expenditure (e.g. a new Municipal Office building) without assessing the overall needs of the municipality as dictated by the Townships Asset Management Plan.

We would request that this letter be included on the agenda for the next appropriate Committee of the Whole meeting for consideration and response.

Respectfully submitted.

The Board and Members of LASHA