



**Flamborough Chamber of Commerce
Hamilton Chamber of Commerce
Stoney Creek Chamber of Commerce
C/O Hamilton Chamber of Commerce**

**The Mayor of the City of Hamilton
And The City of Hamilton Council**

February 28, 2011

Re Response to Citizen's Forum Recommendations

The Flamborough, Hamilton and Stoney Creek Chambers of Commerce have reviewed the report by the Citizen's Forum on Area Rating. We respectfully submit the following observations / recommendations:

Important Missing Information

- 1. Cost / benefits to each of the former municipalities in the City is not included with the Citizen's Forum report. Without this information and the implications of this information to the taxpayers, we believe that it would be very unwise to accept and / or implement the recommendations of the Citizen's Forum.**

Flamborough, Hamilton & Stoney Creek Chamber of Commerce

Opinions

- 2. The area rating debate is much greater than area rating. It is about city building and "healing of the wounds of amalgamation". This was one of the several key observations made by the Chambers when they did a presentation to the Citizen's Forum. The greatest concern of the Chambers is that any changes start to "heal the wounds of amalgamation" and help citizens to work collaboratively towards building economic wealth and a compassionate society. The proposed changes ignore this important reality and will do little to achieve these very important objectives and fact will likely have a negative effect. For example, the recommendation by the Citizen's Forum to remove the snowplowing option for Ancaster will not be received well by the residents of Ancaster and will further inflame the amalgamation debate.**

3. The second key observation that was made by the three Chambers to the Citizen's Forum is that broad based public consultation is necessary if any proposed changes are to be accepted by the residents of the city. The Citizen's Forum is a good start towards public consultation but is just the first step. Broad based consultation across the city with the goal of public buy-in is the logical next step (including the willingness to make changes to any proposed new area rating policy that reflect the feedback received from the consultation process).
4. A third key recommendation that was made by the three Chambers to the Citizen's Forum was to investigate the feasibility / desirability of moving towards a "Geographic Service Zone" Model where residents and businesses pay area rated services based on the services they receive and use. We continue to believe that this approach has the potential to minimize the inequities across the city, reduce the negative feelings towards area rated services and start to heal the "wounds of amalgamation" as opposed to the current proposals of the staff and Citizen's Forum. These current proposals will only serve to inflame the current amalgamation debate.
5. The current recommendations of the staff or Citizen's Forum do little to find ways to encourage taxpayers to help minimize costs and to keep costs in line with surrounding communities. The recommendations to three Hamilton Chambers to the Citizen's Forum included benchmarking to neighbouring communities and keeping track of access and usage of services. These strategies would encourage minimizing costs.
6. When considering street lighting and sidewalks for area rating, we would ask the Council to keep in mind that many suburbs do not have sidewalks and therefore some consideration should be given to service rating street lighting and sidewalks differently than inner city, more densely populated areas.
7. Other major services should be considered for service rating where the differences in cost across the city are significant. This approach will likely balance out the tax increases / decreases associated with changes to area rating and will help to achieve a more equitable "service oriented approach" to area rating. A full analysis of service costs and usage of all major city services would need to be done before deciding on which services to area rate.

Recommendations

1. Assess impact of any proposed changes on all former municipalities and revise plans in a way that begins to "heal the wounds of amalgamation" rather than inflaming this debate.
2. Complete a Cost / Usage / Benefit analysis of all major services in all former municipalities and reflect the findings in any future area rating policy before any decisions are made on area rating changes.
3. Assess the feasibility / desirability of introducing a Geographic Service Zone Model before any decisions are made on future area rating policy.

4. Consider including the following in any future area rating policy: benchmarking to surrounding communities, other services using a Geographic Service Zone Model and strategies that encourage taxpayers and city staff to minimize costs of area rated services.
5. Incorporate further public consultation and “buy-in” before decisions on changes to area rating are approved. We suggest implementing a public consultation / buy-in strategy as the next step in developing a new area rating policy. The strategy should include a willingness to make changes to any proposed new area rating policy that reflect the feedback received from the consultation process.

Respectfully

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