



THE CORPORATION OF THE TOWNSHIP OF PUSLINCH  
JANUARY 17, 2024 PUBLIC INFORMATION MEETING  
VIRTUAL MEETING BY ELECTRONIC PARTICIPATION  
& IN-PERSON AT 7404 WELLINGTON RD 34

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**MINUTES**

**DATE:** January 17, 2024

**TIME:** 7:00 P.M.

The January 17, 2024 Public Information Meeting was held on the above date and called to order at 7:00 p.m. via electronic participation and in-person at 7404 Wellington Rd 34, Puslinch.

**1. CALL THE MEETING TO ORDER**

**2. ROLL CALL**

**ATTENDANCE:**

Mayor James Seeley – Chair  
Councillor Sara Bailey  
Councillor Russel Hurst  
Councillor Jessica Goyda  
Councillor John Sepulis

**STAFF IN ATTENDANCE:**

CAO, Glenn Schwendinger – Absent  
Interim CAO, Courtenay Hoytfox  
Director of Finance/Treasurer, Mary Hasan  
Interim Municipal Clerk, Justine Brotherston  
Director of Public Works, Mike Fowler  
Chief Building Official, Andrew Hartholt  
Interim Fire Chief, Brad Churchill  
Interim Deputy Clerk, Sarah Huether

**3. DISCLOSURE OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

None

**4. PURPOSE OF THE PUBLIC MEETING**

The Chair stated the purpose of this Public Meeting is to inform and provide the public with the opportunity to ask questions, or to express views with respect to the Township's proposed 2024 Budget. The Councillors are here to observe and listen to your comments; however, they will not make any decisions this evening.

The Township requests that you notify by email Mary Hasan at mhasan@puslinch.ca or by phone at 519-763-1226 ext. 222 if you wish to be on record regarding this matter.

Please note the meeting is video and audio recorded and all electronic meetings are uploaded to the municipality's YouTube page. By registering to participate in the meeting by electronic means, you are consenting to have your likeness and comments recorded and posted on YouTube.

The format of this Public Meeting is as follows:

- Mary Hasan, Director of Finance/Treasurer will present the proposed 2024 budget and any further relevant information.



- Following this, the public can obtain clarification, ask questions and express their views.
- Members of the public are permitted 10 minutes each to ask questions and express their views. This time limit is imposed to provide each member of the public an opportunity to speak.

Staff will attempt to answer questions or respond to concerns this evening. If this is not possible, staff will follow up and obtain this information. Responses will be provided when this matter is brought forward and evaluated by Council at the February 7, 2024 Council Meeting.

## **5. PROPOSED 2024 BUDGET PRESENTATION**

Mary Hasan, Director of Finance/Treasurer provided an overview of the proposed 2024 budget, including:

- The budget process.
- What do property taxes pay for in the Township?
- How the budget has changed from 2023
- The impacts of the proposed budget on taxpayers
- What is included in the operating budget
- The 2024 Capital Budget and Long-Term Forecast
- The Township's Discretionary and Restricted Reserves
- Engagement opportunities
- Feedback from the public.

Mayor Seeley then invited members of the public to provide comments.

### **Margaret Hauwert – 50 Brock Rd S**

Good evening, I have six questions. My main question is the engagement survey piece. How many people do take that survey?

### **Mayor James Seeley – Chair**

Justine is looking that up for your. Go ahead with your second question.

### **Margaret Hauwert – 50 Brock Rd S**

I thought Jamie that the community grants were down this year, at least from what I read.

### **Mayor James Seeley – Chair**

My understanding, and I will let staff clarify, is that we approved the same amount this year, maybe we increased it. Where the real decrease happened was the previous budget cycle. There has been a desire by Council to incrementally increase back to historic levels. But, I don't believe we were lower this year than last year. Maybe, Ms. Hasan you can answer that.

### **Mary Hasan - Director of Finance/Treasurer**

Yes, we were higher I believe by about \$5000 compared to last year. Mayor Seeley is correct, last year we did decrease it just based on the budget pressures that were in place last year. It has increased by about \$5000 this year.

### **Margaret Hauwert – 50 Brock Rd S**

Ok, because that's what I thought. With the premise saying it will it was going to go down next year and to be prepared for a decrease in your community grant, which is fine.



**Mayor James Seeley – Chair**

Margaret, that is not correct. Next year, the direction from Council was that our desire is to look at increasing community grants, as long as they are eligible, to historic levels. Typically it is equivalent to half a percent of tax increase. We are moving up not down.

**Margaret Hauwert – 50 Brock Rd S**

Oh okay. Well that's good news for us then.

My other question is with regards to staff increases. I get it. Is it just an automatic cost of living which is just a standard across, or does Council have any input into that?

**Mary Hasan - Director of Finance/Treasurer**

We do have a policy in terms of reviewing CPI from May to May. But, we also do look at what other municipalities' increases are and we have been in line with other municipalities but if Mayor Seeley if you wanted to add to that.

**Mayor James Seeley – Chair**

So, we do have a policy in place that compares CPI from May to May. Our role as Council is we put the policy in place on how staff are supposed to report back on raises which include raises for Council. With the Covid environment that we were operating in for a few years, inflation was through the roof. There was also one year where inflation was zero or maybe one tick below zero. So, there was a recognition from staff that there were protections in that one year that they took their zero percent raise that they wouldn't go backwards and staff brought a policy change forward that we would also cap the CPI tax increase to a certain percent, which was 4%. If CPI from May to May, if it is above 4% than we carry over what wasn't captured to the next year for consideration. Along with that, we also have a market review which then analyzes what we pay compared to other municipalities and then if need be, we do an adjustment. That doesn't necessarily mean there will be an adjustment. That is a second opportunity to catch staff up to ensure staff are being paid at a fair amount.

The second part of that policy is that we look at what percentile we are paying our staff compared to other municipalities and I believe we are at the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile whereas there are other municipalities in Wellington County that are north of the 60<sup>th</sup> percentile. So what that means, is we want to be right in the middle of what staff receive for pay. The municipalities that choose to be at 60% they want to be on the higher end. So, we are trying to find the middle ground and so far we have had good luck with that in keeping our staff here at Puslinch.

**Margaret Hauwert – 50 Brock Rd S**

Right, because I understand retention. Retention would be big for us because we are so small. When you compare, we are comparing with the same size of staffing township, like when we compare for that 50%. We are not comparing with Mississauga versus Toronto?

**Mayor James Seeley – Chair**

First I want to say, is that we don't necessarily go and find a municipality that has 7,500 residents, 3,500 homes and compare what they are paying their staff because they may be located in Manitoba. Through amalgamation in 1999, we were stand alone, so we are quite small. We do have to recognize that we are competing with larger municipalities. We have lost staff to Waterloo, Wilmot Township. So, it is hard to find an exact comparison but we do have to compare against the municipalities that we neighbor and other municipalities in Wellington County to try find some fair remuneration.

**Margaret Hauwert – 50 Brock Rd S**



On one of the slides Mary you talked about penalties being 6%. Can you explain to me what penalties we would have? I wish I could remember what number that was. It does not come up on the zoom as to what slide number that is.

**Mary Hasan - Director of Finance/Treasurer**

It is interest and penalty on taxes that haven't been paid.

**Margaret Hauwert – 50 Brock Rd S**

Oh. We should do it monthly and then it wouldn't be such a big to-do.

So increase in interest is that just because of what the bank was offering. An interest increase, one of the slides talked about that.

**Mary Hasan - Director of Finance/Treasurer**

Interest revenue because of the high interest rate environment we have been in. Our estimate is based on our three year actuals so that increased as part of the 2024 proposed budget compared to the 2023.

**Margaret Hauwert – 50 Brock Rd S**

Alright that is what I thought. And the reserve. You talked a lot about things being in the reserve. So isn't that just like a savings account.

**Mary Hasan - Director of Finance/Treasurer**

Yes. So we do contribute to our discretionary reserves and it is like a savings account in order to fund all of our projects over our 10 year forecast period. We do provide council with the balances in our discretionary reserves to ensure they are reasonable prior to budget approval and as well through the budget process.

**Margaret Hauwert – 50 Brock Rd S**

Ok good. I am sure I am not alone in this, but I am probably the most vocal about it. Is that the County takes such a huge amount of our tax dollars. We had to wait 55 years for a new road, County 46, and a new library long ago. What else does the County do for us that requires such a large portion of our tax dollars?

**Mayor James Seeley – Chair**

The County has social service responsibilities. They do the library program, all of our garbage and recycling and policing, that is a huge component. That is it in a nutshell to be honest with you. Policing is 20 million dollars a year. Paramedics too, EMS, libraries, Road Network for the county and social services, land division.

I will actually back up. Part of the reason why taxes are high for the County portion in Puslinch is assessment value. I believe it was the Mike Harris government changed how we collected taxes and they based it on per 100,000 of assessment. So, Erin, Guelph-Eramosa and Puslinch have higher assessment values than the remainder of the County. So we pay more because our houses are assessed higher. I do not believe it will ever happen but if we were ever to revert back to just taxing per household in the County we would see major reduction but in a sense we are being penalized because our land values are assessed higher.

**Margaret Hauwert – 50 Brock Rd S**

Ok. That does makes sense, but that is a bone of contention always when we talk about the County being \$.67 cents to our \$1.00. And Jamie, a good point would be it would be great to have that written down as to why that County part is big because it is not the existing Council that has anything to do with that. It is what services are we seeing and we are not seeing too much unless you live on 46 and you get the snow plough going down. But, many people that



are new to this Township don't see that 46 is a County road because what does that mean to them, nothing, they commute to Toronto and that the school is Township done. I don't know I just think it is just an awareness of why are we paying so much. And, what social services do we get from the County, I am curious?

**Mayor James Seeley – Chair**

Pretty loaded question. There is a plethora of terms. There is affordable housing, assisted housing, there is transitional housing, there is the shelter system in Guelph. Social Services is administered for the County through the City. There is a cost-sharing component of that. The City pays 90%, we pay 10%. Land ambulance, the County, receives that service through the City of Guelph, that's on the cost-sharing as well. We pay 40% of the cost and the City pays 60%. That is based on a formula around where the call originates and this was all decided back before many of the people here. It went to a tribunal. The County took the City to a tribunal, so that has been hashed out for years. Social Services is administered through us but the burden of the Cost is born by the City of Guelph because that is where most of the residents that are experiencing homelessness are from. But it is land ambulance, EMS is expensive in the County, it is very large geographically and solid waste. Running the one and only landfill is expensive plus picking up the garbage, the green bin, recycling which is actually going to come off of the County's responsibility in 2025. I don't know if that helps.

**Margaret Hauwert – 50 Brock Rd S**

It helps me, but as you know your night that you have these meetings is the same night that as Aberfoyle Agricultural Society meetings so I have not been able to attend. I don't know if the population base is just empathetic or not empathetic at all, we just sit back and complain, I don't know. That County part always comes up when we do Council things. There needs to be an awareness of that, which is just from my point.

**Mayor James Seeley – Chair**

The County meets the last Thursday of every month. So, if our meeting is on the Agricultural Society meeting date that would mean the County date is not. So that is at the County building in the City of Guelph. Admin, Finance and Human Resources meets the second Tuesday of every month. So those are opportunities to come in there where the budget is at the County. Those are open to the public and would be a great opportunity to express your concerns.

**Margaret Hauwert – 50 Brock Rd S**

Yes, Jamie. I will see what I can do about that. Because, you know how I feel about Council meetings. I do not want to repeat because this is all being recorded.

Ok, so the only other piece that I missing is the engagement survey part.

**Justine Brotherston- Interim Municipal Clerk**

To date, for the 2024 survey, the total visits to the site has been 95 with 22 engaged visitors in comparison to 2023. The total for that survey, the visits was 149 and engaged visitors was 35. Just keep in mind our survey is running until January 31<sup>st</sup>.

**Margaret Hauwert – 50 Brock Rd S**

I have already filled it out and it comes to my Twitter. I don't know why people don't access that more. You've got it in a bunch of stuff. That's disappointing because that is not very many people to base on a full Township.

**Mayor James Seeley – Chair**



I will say it is an increase from just old school, have an open door meeting. We are getting more engagement. I do agree with you that more engagement is better, but this is going the right direction.

**Margaret Hauwert – 50 Brock Rd S**

But still not enough considering where the world is going in the media sense. Covid helped the senior base which apparently is the biggest demographic in Puslinch.

There needs to be some engagement elsewhere for that. I am still disappointed because I would like to see that more because the complaints that I hear when I am out and about and I always say to them, do that engagement piece and I can't believe people say, what engagement piece?

Ok. I have no more.

**Mayor James Seeley – Chair**

Well thank you for attending tonight.

**Margaret Hauwert – 50 Brock Rd S**

Well morning for me Jamie.

**Mayor James Seeley – Chair**

Oh Right. Enjoy your vacation. Thank you for taking time away from it. Keep spreading the word on the engagement part of our website.

**Mayor James Seeley – Chair**

Is there other attendees?

**Courtenay Hoytfox - Interim CAO**

If there are any other attendees that are looking to ask questions or make comments, at the bottom of your screen there is a raise your hand button that you can press and your hand will be raised and that will tell us that you are looking to participate.

Mr. Chair we will just give it a few seconds here to make sure people can find that button.

**Mayor James Seeley – Chair**

I'll go to our member in the gallery here to see if they have anything. We have one member in attendance. Do you have some questions you'd like to ask?

**Jason Ganning - 7462 Fielding Lane**

A few questions I have. One would be in the raises to our staffers. I know you compare it to other municipalities as you said previously in the meeting. But, why do we just have to follow suit. The 4%, ok we could have said you only get 2% this year and 2% next year. Just because everyone else is doing it does not mean that we have to do it as well.

**Mayor James Seeley – Chair**

So, Council can choose to make a policy. I mean, we can make a policy that we never get raises. That is our prerogative. We are Council we can make policy for the corporation. But you have to look at as a Council is the value on retention, re-training, and the knowledge base. If we go to a place where we implement a policy that we cap it at 2% and then you are right it is a catch up thing. The neighboring municipalities continue to do CPI. The intent of CPI is to keep you within your economic position in the world. If inflation is going up and your raises are not keeping up with inflation than you are technically going backwards. So our goal as a corporation



is to keep our staff so we are not in this constant cycle of re-training and hiring, because that has a cost. So part of reducing that cost is keeping up with CPI. However, you have those Covid years.

**Jason Ganning - 7462 Fielding Lane**

But I think the Township should be treated more like a business. Like in the private sector, there are a lot of companies out there right now that aren't giving any raises and haven't given any raises even though inflation is increasing. And, I get that doubling staff over is an expense to the Township, but when one fish leaves another one will take its place, that's just life. I get that other people in previous years have left to different municipalities because they were probably paying more money. But if you are happy with Puslinch Township and you like working here than you will probably stay. Most people stay at a company that they like. Not all people just chase the dollar.

**Mayor James Seeley – Chair**

That is a fair statement.

**Jason Ganning - 7462 Fielding Lane**

I would just hope that Council would take into consideration that yes, it is a tough world out there, and when people in the private sector are not getting raises they don't really like to see public staff getting raises.

**Mayor James Seeley – Chair**

Yea, and I think a better spot to adjust that is when we do the market value review. That is a good opportunity for Council to say are we going to go 51%, stay at 50%, what does 50% mean? But, Council is hearing what you are saying.

**Jason Ganning - 7462 Fielding Lane**

If you are say the high end is 60% well than halfway is only 30%, not 50%. Half way compared to another municipality.

**Mayor James Seeley – Chair**

The 50% mark is we are in the 50% of paying top dollar. It is a scale. Maybe you can explain it better.

**Courtenay Hoytfox - Interim CAO**

It is a percentile across municipalities. We would be in and around the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile. Meaning, 50% of municipalities pay more than us, 50 % pay less than us. In Wellington County, the top end of the municipalities among Wellington County tops up at 60<sup>th</sup> percentile meaning there is still 40% of the municipalities paying more than (inaudible).

**Jason Ganning - 7462 Fielding Lane**

I think your staff does a good job. But, I would hope that Council would take this into consideration.

Part two, would be part of our operating budget for our Roads Department. I know that a lot of people in Puslinch complain about our gravel roads and they would like to see more improvement to those gravel roads. I know you are putting good step towards hard surfacing. The downfall of hard surfacing is really makes our back roads super highways for commuters, which is a big problem. I would hope that Council would take into consideration putting some money towards speed monitoring or having the OPP down here more often. I notice they are sitting at the Aberfoyle light which is good. But the biggest thing for me is when it comes to



road maintenance gravel. I see that the budget is allowing for \$75,000 this year. To me it is a huge, huge waste of money. The maintenance gravel, they lay it down and it just gets spread to the shoulders by the vehicles. It is an absolute complete waste of money in my opinion. I am in the construction field. I deal with this all the time. Not so much on roads but in other lines of construction. So my question is, why do we not eliminate some of the road maintenance gravel and direct it more to shoulder reclaiming. Because that is where most of our snow ploughs are depositing gravel through the winter.

**Mayor James Seeley - Chair**

I will let Mr. Fowler answer that. Mr. Fowler if you could focus on the importance, in your opinion, on the maintenance gravel program and what could we expect from our roads if we were to remove that portion of the budget.

**Mike Fowler - Director of Public Works**

Good evening Mr. Chair, as far as maintenance gravel goes, the intent of it is to replenish the gravel on a two year cycle. One year is done on the east side of the Township, one year is done on the west. The main reason for the depletion of gravel which needs to be replaced is a combination of vehicle traffic, snow ploughing and just overall wear and tear. If new maintenance gravel is not placed every two years, eventually you will end up getting into the sub base which consists of clay, large rocks, things like that.

The Township has always been in a position to stay on top of the gravel to keep at least a 6 inch base of granular A or granular M as a driving surface as not to take a risk of eventually getting into the sub base.

**Mayor James Seeley – Chair**

Years gone by, the aggregate producers provided the gravel to the Township as part of the operating. That ship has left port and sank. So, the maintenance gravel is an important component because the (inaudible) the traffic lines are going up. The other thing you mentioned was speed monitoring and enforcement from the OPP. I should back up. Also, the Director brought in and you may have seen it at the bottom end of Concession 7, they are testing different materials to improve the longevity of the gravel road in a good state so Council is looking forward to that report back from Mr. Fowler. I am not sure if it is just a long winter test study but definitely the Council and the staff are trying to find ways to improve the consistency of the gravel roads.

Speed monitoring and that stuff. We have an ongoing discussion with the OPP. We have these things called the Black Cats. I am sure you have read about them or heard about them. But, there was a bit of a gap. An individual like yourself could come in and say I got a concern with Concession 7 speeding and then those Black Cats would be deployed but then there wouldn't necessarily be a follow up. So the OPP has recognized that now and they've (inaudible). They are going to come back and report on how they are going to deal with the data that shows speeding. Now it has to show speeding. If it doesn't show speeding they obviously are not going to come back. Instead of just being a blitz then maybe we are going to see enhanced enforcement over a longer period of time. I don't know what those things are going to be but they are going to come back.

**Jason Ganning - 7462 Fielding Lane**

I was just wondering if we could go back to the road maintenance gravel. \$75,000 equates to about 104 tri-axel loads of gravel being deposited. I just don't see it around our gravel roads. I travel a lot around other municipalities on the same type of roads. I must say they are much better quality than some of our roads. I think a lot of it has to do with the maintenance or the people doing the maintenance and the type of material that they are using. I just don't see why





we need 104 loads of gravel deposited. It's just not there. For the small parts of roadway that they do touch up. I spend a lot of time in the south end of Puslinch, as you know, there are some bad ones down there that are in swamps and we will probably never conquer the problem. But I just don't see 104 loads being useful on our roads. It's just they are not maintaining the roads at the optimal times when they should be maintained and the problem compounds itself because they are not being maintained at the proper times with the proper material. I just don't see the \$75,000 being a huge priority when you can just be reclaiming shoulders. You can spend that \$75,000 and have a shoulder reclaimer come out and bring all that gravel that has been pushed off to the side brought back into the road again. I mean it is quite common practice, maybe not in Ontario so much, but there are a lot of other places that do that.

**Mayor James Seeley – Chair**

I have seen a reclaimer in use. I don't believe we have one ,but I mean that is something the Director can take away as a thought of looking at. With the new climate environment and the challenges with maintaining our gravel roads and you are right about paving and speed concerns. It is a double edged sword.



**Jason Ganning - 7462 Fielding Lane**

I have no problem leaving them gravel.

**Mayor James Seeley – Chair**

There are a lot of people that do though. So it's tough.

Maybe the last part on the maintenance gravel. Mr. Fowler you are saying that we do the east and west side, and you mentioned the 104 tri-axel loads. The \$75,000 does it provide enough gravel to do half of the Township every other year?

**Mike Fowler - Director of Public Works**

Good evening Mr. Chair. We actually decreased the gravel road budget by \$5,000 this year, it used to be \$80,000. Again, we will stretch it as far as we can. Obviously, roads coming out of the spring, that were identified as swampy or the sub-base is deteriorating we concentrate on those roads first and we basically apply gravel until the budget runs out.

**Mayor James Seeley – Chair**

To be truthful Jay, just to speak in honest terms. At \$75,000 that is a point and a half if you were remove it from the budget. You'd get that gained once. So, if there were appetite at the Council to remove it, staff could show you all these graphs that we are not funding our infrastructure deficits so that point and half would not go back to the tax levy we would need to allot it to our asset management plan and infrastructure deficit, because we are already seeing stuff because of Covid-19 and the construction costs go through the roof. We are worried that we are not going to be saving enough money. I don't think there is an appetite, but Council has heard your concerns and we will discuss it at our future budget meetings. For me, if the Director were to come and recommend even reducing the gravel budget I'm going to steer that money towards the asset management plan to ensure that we don't have to be hit with some astronomical tax increase upon bridge replacements or this or that whatever infrastructure is due.

**Jason Ganning - 7462 Fielding Lane**

Thank you.

**Mayor James Seeley – Chair**

You're welcome. Thanks for coming in.

Did anyone else raise their hands?

**Courtenay Hoytfox - Interim CAO**

No, we do not have any other raised hands.

**Mayor James Seeley – Chair**

Alright so last chance for anyone people attending virtually to raise their hands or I am going to declare this meeting closed.

I declare this public meeting closed. Council will take no action on this matter tonight. Staff will be reporting at February 7<sup>th</sup> 2024 Council meeting with a recommendation for Council's consideration. If you wish to receive verbal notifications on this matter you can notify by email Mary Hasan at [mhasan@puslinch.ca](mailto:mhasan@puslinch.ca) or by phone 519-763-1226 ext 222. Only those persons that leave their names will be provided verbal notification. If you wish to speak to the matter when it is brought to Council in the future you must register for delegation with the Township Clerk prior to the meeting.



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**Adjournment:**

The meeting adjourned at 8:00 PM.