

Pontiac Council 2020 budget meeting

Mo Laidlaw

Pontiac municipal council met on Wednesday, 18th December 2019, at the Lusville community centre to adopt the 2020 budget. Director general Pierre Said and Finance director Ginette Chevrier Bottrill were present, as well as 12 members of the public.

The budget was passed by a majority with Councillor Draper-Maxsom voting against. She explained that she had voted against because the MRC portion of the budget has increased by 6.5%, and the recent evaluation of most properties by the MRC did not take account of decreases in the value of properties and reduced business income due to floods. Evaluations have increased by about 5% except in Quyon. Evaluations are done every three years.

The rate increase will be adopted at the 21 January regular council meeting. It is expected to be 2.4%

Questions from the public

Carl Hager asked what effect the loss of houses due to floods has on the budget. Mayor Joanne Labadie replied that the municipality lost 29 properties due to the 2017 floods and to-date has lost 14 houses from the 2019 flood. The Ministry of Public Security (MSP) does not share information, so the municipality only learns of losses when the owner asks for a demolition permit. Properties acquired by the municipality are not taxable. There were 175 claims for damage. Expenses due to floods are refunded 75% by the MSP, leaving the municipality with at least \$100,000 extra expenses so far.

Most (86%) of the budget is fixed expenses such as the MRC share (police etc), garbage and recycling, collective agreements and insurance, so savings have to be found in the remaining 14%.

Joan Belsher asked about the cost of the repair to ch Alary. Labadie replied: so far \$345,000 has been received from the MSP with more to come as invoices are received. The final cost to the municipality is about \$100,000. No information is available yet about repairing the fatal ch Bronson-Bryant washout, but ch du Lac-la-Pêche near Masham is not eligible for a grant. Continuing to fix ch de la Montagne will be revisited. The initial estimate and borrowing by law were for \$1.8 million, but recent tenders were for \$4 million.

Belsher also asked about the increase in "Arts and Recreation". Labadie replied that Community living is included in this category, which includes community centres, 7 parks, 3 rinks, and support for local organizations.

Denis Dubé asked about the three year program of capital expenditures. Labadie explained that some projects listed for 2019 will be done later. She reminded everyone that the 3-year program is required by Québec, and is a wish-list.

Melvin Maxsom asked about the NCC contribution in lieu of taxes for Gatineau Park, 47% of the municipality. The evaluation is up this year. It is to be seen whether the NCC will contest it, as they did for Chelsea last year.

Roger Larose, a former mayor, asked several questions about where savings have been made, answered by the Finance director: There were cuts in administration to balance increases in salaries. The Assistant director general Geneviève Latulippe is acquiring legal

qualifications which decreases outside legal costs. Legal actions initiated before this council took office have also ended, reducing legal costs.

Mayor Labadie thanked councillors and staff for many early morning and late evening meetings to work on the budget, resulting in Pontiac continuing to have the lowest tax rate in the region, despite the “infrastructure deficit that goes back decades.” Councillors brought residents’ concerns to the table, as the needs of each ward are very different.

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