

Greetings from your County Councilor

With Tax notices recently sent out I thought about a letter I prepared a few years ago, for a Hugh Sutherland Highschool student who asked me a very good question: "*So what do we get for our tax dollars?*" Here is an excerpt from a letter I sent him in response (with some update to today's dollars and activities)

"Here are some ideas in regard to the use of your tax dollars: Roads are the first things that come to mind for most people, so I'll start there. In 2008, \$22 million was spent on our roads, 70% of taxes spent go to the Operational Services Department, towards our road infrastructure. We have 1800 miles of roads to maintain in our county! The money goes towards road development, road repair, road grading, ditching, patching, re-graveling, approach development and inspections, culverts, gravel pits, snowplowing, sanding, equipment, signage, staff wages, chip sealing, plus the running of several county shops to repair and maintain all that equipment.

There are **protection** costs as well – we pay into (and participate on the boards with all five towns) fire services, ambulance services, and disaster services, including all the staff, equipment, buildings and infrastructure involved. Then there are our **special constables/ by-law officers** who work very hard looking after policing our county roads as well as enforcing county by-laws.

We have recently had all of our county GPS surveyed so we have a record all residences and their driveways for emergency vehicles to reach the people more quickly.

Your county has an **Agricultural Service Board and Department**, who help our County residents with trees, weed and pest control, offer education sessions and much more.

Our **Planning Department** is an area of our County most people don't see until they want to build a home or subdivide an acreage. This takes hours of the Council's time each month as well. We spend two full days every month dealing with land use issues, plus our pre-reading time before the meetings. The more people are sub-dividing property and building or developing in our County the more staff this requires to handle the workload. In the past few years this department has worked especially hard in dealing with five annexations by all the towns, four Area Structure Plans and a new Municipal Development Plan (MDP) and currently are working on a total re-write of the Land Use Bylaw.

We also help look after the **Waste Management** in the county. Along with our urban partners, we pay into and participate in the management of **Seniors Housing** needs in our County. We also contribute to the six Libraries in our region, Museums, Recreational Facilities and FCSS funding for Social Programs, Community Hall grants, and new school sites, just to name a few.

We have an **Accounting Department**, who keep all the books for this entire organization straight. This includes the **Assessment Department**, who undertake a sight visitation on rotational bases, to all the county residences. They compare the property and residences to “market values” (what similar homes or properties sold for in the past year in that area) in each area and assign an assessment to each and every property.

**Council** is another area; we (seven elected area representatives) are the governing body of our County. We are paid based on the amount of work, meetings and special events we attend (I average about 3-4 days per week). We oversee and direct how and where our tax dollars are to be spent and develop the guiding policies and vision for the County. However we do not manage the staff, which is the job of our CAO, Doug Plamping and our Department Directors.

Don't forget the **utilities and building cost** to house the staff and host public meetings in.”

This is a quick list and certainly not exhaustive. I hope it helps to understand the complexity of what your County representatives and staff do to deliver to you “the best bang for your buck.”

CONGRATULATIONS to all the HSHS Grad class of 2009 !