

Residents can have input on local policing

by Wendy Spence
THE SIGNPOST

The Thames Centre Police Services Board has created a survey that is now available on the municipality's website and Facebook page. The OPP budget is forecast to be \$1,781,791 for 2019 or \$323 per household.

"We want to understand what the community thinks about the policing," explained former mayor Jim Maudsley, who is a community representative on the board. "We want to get some good dialogue out of it that we can move forward with." He said there aren't a lot of questions and the survey is easy to fill out. It should take about five minutes on average to complete. Residents that are 18 and older can respond anonymously. There is a section for comments. "If you just got run through a RIDE program and got nailed, that's what it (the program) is for," Maudsley said. "If you've got a just concern, I'd really like to hear about it, everybody would." The board wants to know what residents feel the police are doing well and areas where they can improve.

The longtime resident was involved in establishing the police offices in Dorchester and Thorndale. "I think just the presence in Dorchester has helped." There are a lot of OPP vehicles coming off the highway and using the office, and the Thorndale office is getting used a lot as well. "There's a slight cost to have them in our structures, but I think it's well worth it. I've always been an advocate for those and I'm glad to see them being used the way they are."

Maudsley is surprised that some people he talks to don't know there is a police services board in Thames Centre. Members meet meets four to five times a year in the council chambers at the municipal office on Hamilton Road. The meeting dates are posted on thamescentre.on.ca and they are open to the public. If people have a legitimate complaint, they can request delegation status to discuss it with the board. "We're prepared to listen to it and find out what we can do to correct it and make everybody happy."

The board reports to council and council approves the minutes, as well as the budget and everything related to board. Two councillors sit on the board. The police reports show numbers for all types of crimes occurring in Thames Centre. "That really gives us a chance to zero right in on what our issues are," said Maudsley.

The Thames Centre Police Services Board was established when the bylaw was passed in July 2010. Council believed they could save almost \$250,000 having a standalone board and not joining with Middlesex County. "We as council of the day felt it was better to be under contract with the OPP than it was just to stay the status quo," the former mayor explained. Before the board, the OPP came in once a year and presented what happened in the municipality. The municipality didn't have any say or input. "We just felt that we could do better," Maudsley said. "When I first got elected in 2006 I made the promise that we would try to improve policing and part of that was to hire a bylaw enforcement officer and be involved with the policing itself. It gives us a chance to oversee the level of service provided by the OPP." A Code of Conduct and procedural bylaw were established. The board includes the mayor of the municipality or their designate (Mayor Alison Warwick), a councillor appointed by council (Ward 2 Councillor Chris Patterson), a community representative (Maudsley, who is chair) and two provincial representatives that are appointed by the province (vice-chair Russell Baines and Christine Kirkpatrick). The policing contract is renewed every year. The current agreement expires at the end of this year.

Maudsley said that benefits of having a police services board include being able to work with a detachment commander (who they help hire) on annual performance reviews. The board can let the OPP know if the municipality would like more monitoring in certain areas. "It gives us direct input into policing." Thames Centre receives RIDE program grants so there's no cost to participate in the

program. The value for this service was about \$9,000 last year. They get a chance to do a quarterly review to see where we are in respect to where our budget is.”

Some of the main concerns in Thames Centre according to Maudsley include speeding, traffic infractions, minor vehicle break-ins and drivers failing to come to a complete stop at stop signs.