

# Jack's Recap

October 26th, 2015: Where are the savings? Are they obvious?

After viewing this Monday's council meeting in its entirety, I must say I am perplexed. Oscar Poloni laid out his public report for all to see. This included increases in user fees and other cutbacks adding up to \$7M (five of which was not even touched on as it directly impacts employees). Since the public is not privy to what type of opportunities are included in this \$5M, then we are left to wonder whether items like staffing levels, rising police costs, and municipal long term care are part of the savings. The cost of running a municipal long term care facility costs the city millions and although one can read about how some savings can be achieved in the full report, there is no real mention about whether the city should look at divesting to the not-for-profit or private industries. When Oscar first presented to Council many months ago, he stated very firmly that there were four options (re: divesting and management) for the Golden Manor and yet nothing mentioned in his presentation, so we are led to wonder whether this was discussed in camera?

As a member of the newly minted TTA there would be no better opportunity for us than to point out and get behind these opportunities to save millions of dollars. The taxpayers of Timmins are the highest in the comparative group and we deserve these savings. The TTA will always advocate for savings whenever they present themselves. We have been trying to tell Council that running a city owned LTCF is simply not sustainable at the rate that its budget has been increasing. Well, we all know how that went down.... We also questioned the donation of almost \$10,000 to one organization. This was also met with negativity informing us that this one event brings thousands of tourist dollars by way of meals purchased at local restaurants and hotel rooms rented. This event might entertain many local spectators, but should it be at the cost to the taxpayers, especially when they already have over eighty thousand dollars in donations and revenues? The budget for donations to organizations was \$105k for 2015 and Mr. Poloni points this out as an opportunity and we also question whether it is up to our Council to decide which organizations are most deserving of this money, taxpayers money. In theory then all organizations holding weekend events make the same claims of tourist dollars generated to this city (ie: hockey, ringette ,basketball, baseball, etc). Most cities have discontinued these donations and those that have continued have established stringent application processes along with capping the donation amount and outright cancelling them completely during an election year. KPMG suggests in its report that utilizing city manpower should be charged back to the event and not donated as in kind like our kayak festival that employed city staff at a cost of over \$22K and at the mercy of their regular duties. On top of that, the cost of tourism to the taxpayers in Timmins is three times higher than North Bay and ten times higher than Sault Ste Marie. Where does the money train end?

We also questioned the feasibility study for a new aquatic center. Our arenas are in dreadful shape and yet Council and Mayor embark on a \$150K study to see if we can

build a new pool? Oscar also points out that most municipalities are looking at multi-use facilities – it just makes sense.

There are indeed many opportunities for the city to save or generate dollars to alleviate the high tax burden placed upon the average Timmins taxpayer. One other opportunity pointed out by the report was to begin a flat rate water fee for residential homes. Other opportunities would be to collect user fees for thawing and repairing of frozen water lines and to increase those user fees after warnings to people (to keep a tap running in winter) as these such incidents cost the city as much as \$5K. False police and fire calls should be subjected as well. I could go on and on but I would rather you all read the 186 page report for yourself. Will the city act upon these opportunities or just ignore them? Only time will tell....

That's a rap on this week's recap!