



## NEWS LOCAL

### Council makes move to trim budget

By Elaine Della-Mattia, Sault Star  
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City council narrowly approved a motion that directs city staff in each major department to prepare a preliminary budget that will see no increase in costs.

The motion, passed in a 6-5 recorded vote was moved by Ward 3 Coun. Matthew Shoemaker and seconded by Ward 4 Coun. Rick Niro. It asks staff to develop a budget with a 0 per cent increase over their 2017 approved budget, including a list of cost saving options for council to consider to achieve that result.

The departments are also asked to provide a further list of cost saving options to achieve a 1 per cent overall reduction from their 2017 approved budgets.

Shoemaker said that believes its prudent to get the results on the options from staff now so proper consideration can be made by council during the budget deliberation process.

He said it's important for council to weigh the options of what services, programs, staff or projects would need to be trimmed or cut and how that would affect operations overall.

Simply put, Shoemaker said if the city doesn't get its tax dollars owed from Essar Steel Algoma, there will need to be reductions within the city budget.

"I prefer this method to the draconian methods suggested elsewhere," he said.

Mayor Christian Provenzano questioned whether the substance of the resolution is already being done by city staff.

He said recommendations will be coming back to council by July if the city isn't able to recover the taxes owed by Essar Steel Algoma.

"I don't have any issue with the spirit of the motion, I have an issue with the timing of it," he said.

But Niro countered that those recommendations traditionally occur during the 11th hour at budget deliberations and it's often difficult for councillors to properly weigh the options and make an informed decision.

"I don't appreciate making an \$800,000 to \$1 million decision at one council meeting when the options are just presented to me," Niro said

By receiving the options in November, at the preliminary budget session, councillors have more time to consider the options, he said.

Ward 1 Coun. Paul Christian said he believes the resolution is too early to consider and counterproductive at this stage.

"I think council needs to take on a more positive narrative," he said, adding that in Monday night's debate, Essar Steel Algoma situation was mentioned at least 18 times and he believes it's 'unfortunate' the acute financial situation is mentioned so frequently.

"I want to make it very clear, that when the time comes, if we have to make cuts, I'll stand up and be counted," he said. "But this is too premature."

But Ward 2 Coun. Sandra Hollingsworth countered the resolution was not premature because she too found that last year's recommendations from staff came too late in the game and it was difficult to make such drastic decisions at the budget meeting. She called the move a method to continue improving the budget process.

"I don't think it's sending negative messages out to the city. It's sending the message that we need to stay on top of our finances and we're facing reality. Weighing the pros and cons is not a bad thing," she said.

She encouraged the finance committee to work with staff to determine the pros and cons and how any proposed changes can impact the community.

Her wardmate disagreed.

Susan Myers said "zero (per cent) is not zero. It's already one per cent of a reduction because of rising costs."

Myers said she's not a fan of imposing budgeting rules across the board to all departments because of the different roles they play in the community and the tasks that city council charges them with.

"How can they have recommendations if we don't change the level of service," she asked. "I'm not supporter of asking staff 'what ifs'. If we're not going to be increasing our budget, then be definitive about it and let's say it now."

Myers also doesn't want staff to write reports that may not be used.

Ward 1 Coun. Steve Butland said he understands the reasoning behind the motion but says there have been so many similar type resolutions that there should be a moratorium on these resolutions.

"I know we have to react to things, but I think we are over reacting to things," Butland said, suggesting that resolutions don't add to the anxiety already existent in the community.

Those in favor of the resolution included Shoemaker, Niro, Hollingsworth, Judy Hupponen, Frank Fata and Marchy Bruni.

Those against included Provenzano, Butland, Christian, Myers and Lou Turco.

Ward 6 councillors Joe Krmpotich and Ross Romano have taken a leave of absence and were not in attendance at the council meeting.

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