



NEWS LOCAL

City user fees going up Jan. 1

By Elaine Della-Mattia, Sault Star
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It's going to cost a little more for facility rentals, licences, bus trips and engineering services in the new year.

The majority of the city's user fees are increasing effecting Jan. 1, 2018 in order to come closer in line with recovery costs of the service.

City council passed a resolution Monday that sets the stage for the increases and will result in an increase of \$281,360 of revenue 1 the city to be applied to the 2018 operating budget.

User fees are one of the few controllable sources of revenue that can reduce the reliance on property taxes, council was told.

The city embarked upon a comprehensive user fee study, completed by Hemson Consulting Inc., that examined the full costs of various services and the level of recovery through user fees.

Benchmarks for cost recovery have been recommended based upon the study results along with a multi-year plan on how to get to that level.

A report to council states that more municipalities are looking at user fees to help offset the impact of municipal services on property taxes.

All areas of service will be affected by the changes.

Transit riders, who took the hardest hit in 2017, will see fares increase another 10 cents per cash fare starting Jan. 1 while monthly passes will increase by about \$1.

Lottery licences will see a 2 per cent return of the prize value to the city, up a full percent from the previous year.

City clerk Malcolm White said that during the “tough years” when bingo hall closures were affecting the fundraising of non-profits, city council temporarily reduced the fee to 1 per cent return of prize value. Under provincial legislation it can be set as high as three per cent but that will be phased in over a two-year period.

Marina fees, Bondar Pavilion rentals, arena and sports field rentals, pool fees and park fees will all see increasing rates, the report notes.

Cemetery fees, rezoning fees, engineering and building permits and services will also see various increases.

Ward 3 Coun. Matthew Shoemaker's bid to remove the engineering fee increases – which he believes could hamper development – were rejected by council.

CAO Al Horsman said that the completed user fee comprehensive report has resulted in an in-depth review of all user fees and a plan on how to bring those fees up to date and in proximity to those charged in other communities.

Ward 1 Coun. Steve Butland said no one likes raising user fees but “the reality is we have to and we're doing it bit by bit.”

The resolution passed in an 8-3 recorded vote. Those in favor of the recommended increases included Mayor Christian Provenzano and councillors Steve Butland, Paul Christian (Ward 1), Susan Myers, Sandra Hollingsworth (Ward 2), Judy Hupponen (Ward 3), Lorne Turco and Rick Niro (Ward 4).

Those opposed included Ward 3's Matthew Shoemaker, Ward 5's Marchy Bruni and Ward 6 Ozzie Grandinetti.

Ward 5 Coun. Frank Fata and Ward 6 Coun. Joe Krmpotich were absent from the meeting.

Meanwhile, city council also passed a resolution asking staff to examine options that would see surrounding townships charged a 5 per cent premium on top of the cost recovery amount for contracted services with the City of Sault Ste. Marie. Any increases would not become effective until new contracts are signed with the neighbouring townships.

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