

# South Bruce Peninsula council doing no better minding our tax dollars now than a year ago

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By Gordon M. MacDonald

It is now almost a year ago that I wrote a letter for our taxpayers titled "Cut the South Bruce Peninsula budget" in an appeal to my fellow constituents to pay more attention to the lack of control on how our money is being spent.

A copy of that letter is below and today it now appears to be more significant than it was last year.

Fiscal responsibility requires leadership from council and competence from staff. We don't seem to be getting either. Thankfully, one forward step (reducing the number of councillors) is a good start but with respect to savings, it is only a drop in the bucket.

Early planning is required and the approval of a final budget for the calendar year long before Easter (or later), which includes the inclusion of public input.

Once again I'm appealing to you the taxpayers - please pay attention to what your council is doing when they review the cheque register. They are overspending and appear to be giving our legal costs a free ride.

Here is a copy of last year's letter: Let's work together and get some fiscal results. We need to be more aware of how and why the cheques are being signed!!

To the taxpayers of South Bruce Peninsula: My wife (the former Vivian Hardman) and I grew up on the Bruce Peninsula - me in Wiarton and she in Mar. Both of us moved out of the area for economic reasons but came back here to our roots because of our love of family and down-to-earth fellowship.

We have always been interested in how our taxes are used at all three levels of government. We have also been able to contribute in more ways than financial at various locations.

We have noted the debates that have taken place in Meaford, Owen Sound, TSBP at the council tables and wonder why the debates always turned to bickering.

Bickering precludes the need for councils to run their agenda like a business and this becomes very costly.

After doing our best to watchdog the previous council, we now have a completely new council and we relaxed with the hope of improvement. Why has the conflict continued? Well let's explore some of the questionable changes.

First let me remind all of you in our little community that we don't need the position of a chief administrative officer - our current budget doesn't permit it. Back at the time of our amalgamation, a CAO was hired on a temporary basis to assist in the transition. When the amalgamation was completed the position was kept.

This was a mistake that compounded the problem of being saddled with a permanent position of CAO on the organizational chart.

When that CAO retired the problem was compounded when the wrong candidate was hired as a replacement - a decision that caused taxpayers considerable unnecessary dollars including legal expenses.

The basic management requirement at that time (and still exists today) is a professional who knows how to handle staff including the matter of allowing key employees to do their job without the bottleneck of micro-managing but, at the same time, providing direction as it is required.

One of the things we did when we moved back to the area was compare administrative costs of South Bruce Peninsula with other municipalities of the same size. It was out of whack then and it has since worsened!

We encourage you ( like us) the taxpayers to take a look at the discrepancy.

Your benchmark should be administrative costs measured as a percentage against revenues and compare it with other municipalities. Then we will be justified in asking (no, make that demanding) that the budget for 2012 be reduced to 10% below the budget of 2011.

Town staff is responsible to council for whatever budget is approved. Based on current performance it seems as though it is the other way around. The tail is wagging the dog and the dog keeps chasing its tail.

During the campaign our current councillors put emphasis on the need for change and that's why they were voted in.

OK , it's not happening so we're asking the councillors to step up to the plate and make change happen and we're asking you the taxpayer to call your councillor and hold his or her feet to the fire.

We're asking you to do it, not just think about it. You can reduce it to one simple sentence - what are you doing to reduce the budget?

Let's help our councillors do their jobs.

We are being told that the cost to run this municipality can't be reduced and the new council is having success by keeping the budget to a zero increase. Well that's not good enough! Take a look at the cheque register. Make yourself familiar with staff function.

How do salaries relate to the community at large?

What changes would you make if it was your business?

Example: Would you have two receptionists as well as an automatic phone answering system?

Please, make phone calls. Ask questions!

Let's consolidate! It won't be easy, (We have eight councillors and one mayor. I phoned all of them six days ago and have had a response from only four councillors) but it will be worth it. You shouldn't have to pay more taxes (on a per capita basis) than other municipalities of the same size.

Remember, council and staff are responsible to taxpayers. You are the employer and if we have to set up our own board of directors, then let's do it!

It was your vote that gave us a new council. It's time for an assessment, so do your homework and if you don't think they are pulling it off, then let's help them.

If you, in turn, are looking for help, then call me at 519-534-5744 or e-mail me at [gormac@myway.com](mailto:gormac@myway.com).

I have qualified helpers waiting in the wings and we'll outline the first three steps in how to save the most money!

The 2012 budget needs to be a minimum of 10% below the 2011 budget. The savings are there.

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