

ARBITRATION WITH TBL OVER THE COST OF FIRE PROTECTION SERVICES

Dear Editor,

In the present political context of Quebec, when costs of services are being downloaded on property owners, every council has an obligation to not only keep its costs down, but to maintain the integrity and the interests of its own community, and this is why the council of West Bolton felt it was necessary to go to arbitration against TBL over the high increase in the cost of fire protection.

The municipality of WB can stand proud when it comes to the results of the arbitration. We all know that the media likes to report events so as to provoke public reaction. However, there was something for both parties in the judgment, even though TBL won the main arguments. The amounts quoted in the BCN article of December 31st 2012 were premature. The calculations are complex and will vary from year to year. TBL will have to provide many justifying documents.

It is true that the Administrative Judge considered the RFU (Uniformized Property Valuation) to be the most equitable manner in which to divide the fixed costs for fire protection services, which include the long term debt for the fire trucks. This was TBL's position from the beginning.

However, the Commission also ruled that it would be unfair to apply the same formula across the board. It stated that the number of interventions would be greater in the municipality with the higher number of buildings and so the salaries and social benefits for the volunteer firemen when called out for fires or for prevention, will be shared in proportion to the number of buildings, and not based on evaluation.

In addition, the arbitration judgement stated that the amount that TBL claimed to be the cost of Fire Protection in 2010 included \$34,446 worth of expenses unrelated to fire protection. TBL was advised to be "vigilant" in basing the cost of its services on expenses that were actually incurred.

Even though BCN reported that a deal was struck during mediation, there was never a true meeting of the minds, which is the essence of mediation. TBL presented a take-it-or-leave-it position. The proposal covered the current time period only, with no agreement for the future. The WB council did not find it wise to approve a solution that was not workable long term and would need to be renegotiated every year or two.

This Council has no regrets with respect to the arbitration. It was crucial to show that West Bolton is not an expanded tax base for TBL when it comes to providing services. We feel that this was sufficiently accomplished.

What is important now is to get back to business and promote good relations between the communities.

The Municipal Council of West Bolton
January 14th 2013