

Espanola mayor pleads with Manitoulin-Sudbury District Services Board to refund apportionment

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With the Assessment Review Boards decision at the end of 2012 that saw Domtar's assessment for 2009 to 2012 drop considerably, Mayor Mike Lehoux who sits on the Manitoulin-Sudbury District Services Board asked the board to reduce the town's apportionment to the MSDSB.

The drop in assessment has had a dramatic impact on Espanola's tax base.

The letter sent to the MSDSB read "Our apportionment payments to the MSDSB have been based on the weighted assessment as returned by MPAC for these affected years. These substantial retroactive assessment reductions have resulted in an overpayment of our share to your board for these years."

Fern Dominelli, MSDSB chief administrator officer, told the board that had the ARB decision been returned prior to the deadline for the 2013 year the budget was set and based on the individual municipalities' MPAC assessments would have been different. The assessment the board uses is based on the information available as of the second Tuesday following Dec. 1 in the year in which the assessment is made. If the arbitrator's decision for the ARB had come only weeks earlier this amount for the 2013 apportionment would have changed. Espanola would then have paid nearly \$150,000 less to the MSDSB.

Many of the board members sympathized with Lehoux and his town's situation. They agreed that no decision would be able to be made during this meeting and as suggested by the board this issue will be going to the finance committee prior to the April meeting. The board is not sure on how to proceed with this issue as their budget has already been set for 2013. The MSDSB reserves are in large part ear-marked for projects in this year and the funds would be attached to provincial dollars with specific guidelines. In the working reserves there is only a little more than \$200,000. Working reserves are the funds remaining which the MSDSB can utilize for emergencies or projects which may come about at any given time and are not earmarked for any specific project.

Any decision made to assist the town could set a precedent with the board and will have to be explored at the fullest extent.