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## NEWS LOCAL

# Council upset with rent increase for non-profit housing

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Councillors were disappointed to learn that the Manitoulin-Sudbury District Services Board (DSB) will increase its rental rate over the next two years.

"I am disappointed, but not surprised, and in my opinion ludicrous, rent increases were imposed on the non-profit housing facilities," Councillor Bob Yocum said after reading the minutes from the Sept. 24 DSB meeting. "The effects of this will be negative, and time will reveal how serious the effects are going to be in impacting Espanola and general rents and non-profit housing facility that we have in town."

Yocum said he was also disappointed that the increase will be phased in over two years rather than three.

"It's ludicrous to use income to set the rent," he continued.

The rent for non-profit housing has increased up to \$940 a month for a one bedroom apartment. The increased amount had the small crowd attending the meeting gasping at the price.

Ray Hunt, former CEO of the Espanola Regional Hospital and Health Centre, had spoken to the DSB board regarding the increase and suggested that the increase start at \$650. At the DSB meeting and the Oct. 27 meeting, Mayor Ron Piche opposed the rent increase.

"It's not a good thing to happen," Piche solemnly said.

Councillor Stewart Meikleham is also opposed to the rate increase and stated council members are appalled "on the attack on people who cannot afford the rent increase."

He asked if a motion of reconsideration could be considered. Yocum said it probably has to be done at the board level.

Meikleham asked for a consensus from council to discuss the increase. Piche suggested a letter be drafted opposing the increase.

"We represent our citizens, and this dramatically affects (them)," said Meikleham.

The number of residents affected by the increase varies on the usage of the non-profit housing.

The new rates for non-profit housing will come into effect on Jan. 1, 2016 and current tenants will get a minimum six months notice to any rent increase.

In other council news, taxpayers wanted it but only one person has used it.

The question period has been added to the regular council agenda since July, but was only taken advantage of once, and the questions could not be answered at that time.

"People are telling me they are having a problem with the question period," said Councillor Ray Dufour. "It's just that it is not a wide spectrum that they can select from and would like to see it changed to something more elaborate."

Dufour said question period is not working as no one has come up.

He told council he would like to revisit the idea of the question period to fix the issue. Piche said it is something that can be looked at.

Councillor Ron Duplessis asked what was occurring with the OPP costing.

Clerk administrator/treasurer Cynthia Townsend said the moratorium has been expanded.

Piche, who also sits on the Espanola Police Services Board, told Duplessis they are on the list but are not sure where they sit on it.

Council discussed holding an open house on Dec. 10 to allow residents to speak with departments regarding issues and concerns that they may have. It was mentioned that council have a booth set up with information regarding challenges from a budget standpoint.

Piche said open houses have occurred in the past, but are not historically well attended. However, he does not want the open house to become a council meeting.