

Rural area still wouldn't pay full cost of stormwater services



[Jon Willing](#)

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Rural landowners still wouldn't pay the full cost of stormwater services in their communities under a proposed billing system. Reader Photo

Rural landowners still wouldn't be paying the full cost of stormwater mitigation in their communities under a proposed fee structure, but Mayor Jim Watson doesn't mind.

Landowners who don't receive a water and sewer bill don't pay into the stormwater program. The city wants to start billing them on their property tax invoices to collect \$2 million for stormwater services.

However, the city is spending \$8.4 million on stormwater services in rural Ottawa this year. Stormwater costs in the urban area are \$33.8 million and those residents will continue to help pay for stormwater services in the rural area under the proposed scheme.

"We're one city but we have different nuances in each community and we try to help one another and I think this is an example of the urban-suburban community helping the rural area for the simple reason that they have such a small population base that to ask them to pay \$8 million would be not fair," Watson said Tuesday.

On the other hand, many rural residents lament paying a new tax they perceive is paying for the urban sewer network. Stormwater infrastructure in the rural area is mostly roadside ditches, culverts and drainage ponds.

Landowners who aren't connected to city services haven't been paying into the stormwater program since amalgamation, when the council of the day decided to plug the stormwater budget into the water and sewer rate budget, rather than the property tax budget.

Rideau-Goulbourn Coun. Scott Moffatt, chair of council's agriculture and rural affairs committee, acknowledged that the [proposal announced this week](#) still isn't the fairest way to collect fees since stormwater infrastructure varies across rural Ottawa.

"What anyone in the rural area that doesn't pay now would like is continuing to not pay anything. That's a given. It just comes down to, you have to do something where residents are paying for services they receive," Moffatt said.

“The new structure attempts to reflect that difference as best as possible. It’s not perfect.”

The environment committee will consider changes to the water, sewer and stormwater billing structure Oct. 18.

Staff should examine process for special area levies, committee decides

Council’s finance and economic development committee on Tuesday directed staff to review special area levies after a councillor questioned the fairness of the community taxes.

Any councillor can ask for council’s support to create a special area levy to pay for a community project. Most recently special levies have been started in Kanata North ward for an anti-mosquito program and Alta Vista for an open-air refrigerated rink at the Canterbury Recreation Complex.

Coun. Scott Moffatt wants tighter controls that mirror the process for local improvement charges, which require the support of two-thirds of households that would benefit from a capital project. Special area levies don’t require any community votes.

Kanata North Coun. Marianne Wilkinson and Alta Vista Coun. Jean Cloutier felt compelled to defend their respective levies at the committee meeting. Local councillors should be trusted to know what’s needed for their communities, Cloutier said.

Committee OK with more donation spending in 2017 from office budgets

Council members could be unshackled to spend more of their office budgets on Ottawa 2017 events.

Knoxdale-Merivale Coun. Keith Egli won unanimous support from the finance and economic development committee to allow more spending on donations and sponsorships in Canada’s 150th birthday year.

The council expense policy limits politicians’ spending on donations to 3.5 per cent of their ward office budgets. In 2016, the donation cap for councillors is \$8,730 and \$28,945 for the mayor.

Letting councillors spend an extra \$5,000 on community events for the 2017 celebrations is “reasonable,” according to Egli.

Council will be asked to approve the recommendation Oct. 12.

jwilling@postmedia.com

twitter.com/JonathanWilling