

August 8, 2017

Council Members
Township of Frontenac Islands
90 Baseline Road
RR #4 Gananoque Ontario
K7G 2V6

Re: Howe Island Ferries: Fees and Fare Structure

Dear Sirs:

You have indicated to us that you are considering options for restructuring the fees and fares By-Law 21-2016 being a by-law to establish a fees and fares schedule for the County and Township ferries serving Howe Island. As we understand it and as part of your review, the Township will be holding a public meeting on August 29th 2017 to hear the views of residents and other users of the ferry service on this vitally important subject. We have noted from Council minutes of June 12th that Council's intention is to gather input from Howe Islanders for Council to review and determine the best method of moving forward. We would like to know how Council proposes to gather such input apart from having a public meeting or meetings. We would hope and strongly suggest that the Township publish and widely circulate a draft of your proposals so that before implementation of any changes, the residents and other users have an adequate opportunity to review any such proposals and to provide further input. The persons most affected by any changes should thereby be reasonably satisfied with the results and will have had a direct hand in the process.

You have asked HIRA for their views on the subject and we have now had an opportunity to consider various options. As you know, HIRA has been active for over 12 years representing Howe Island ratepayers. We have not, in connection with this subject and your request, conducted a survey of our members but would be pleased to do so.

Currently the fare structure, as we understand it, for service on each ferry is the same:

- a) a round trip for cars and small trucks without an annual pass is \$6.00;
- b) a round trip for large trucks without an annual pass is \$15.00;
- c) a round trip for cars and small trucks with trailers without an annual pass is \$12.00;
- d) an annual yearly pass for one vehicle is \$255; for two vehicles for the same owner is \$319 (subject to a 10% discount for seniors); and
- e) an annual fee for trailers being towed by an annual pass holder is \$255.00.

There are 15 spaces for each car or small truck on the County ferry and 3 spaces for each car or small truck on the Township ferry.

We think that there are inequities in the current fare structure in that, among other inequities:

- i) residents with one vehicle are charged a higher price per vehicle than residents with two vehicles;
- ii) vehicles occupying multiple spaces are charged the same amount as a vehicles occupying one space; and
- iii) vehicles with heavy loads such as cement trucks which because of ferry weight restrictions, restrict other vehicles from loading onto the ferry at the same time, are charged \$15.00 notwithstanding such trucks effectively occupy all 15 spaces.

The level of ferry service for Howe Island in terms of both efficiency and sufficiently has, we believe, a direct bearing on the value of real estate on the Island. Currently owners of vacant land on the Island do not pay to maintain the ferry service to the same level or degree as owner-residents of the Island. We believe this is another inequity.

Please consider the following suggestions in your deliberations. We would welcome your comments in advance of and following any public meetings so that we may respond specifically to any questions and suggestions you may have:

A) For vehicles without an annual pass, charge a set fee for each space or part space occupied. For example, if two spaces are occupied, charge \$12.00 at the current fare rate. If one large truck effectively occupies the entire County ferry, charge \$6.00 per space for 15 spaces or \$90.00.

B) For a vehicle with an annual pass, charge an additional \$6.00 for each space occupied over one space. For example, if such a vehicle is towing a trailer and occupies three spaces, it is charged for two spaces or \$12.00.

C) Price annual passes at one charge per vehicle. Design the passes so that the tag number of the vehicle is clearly marked on the pass at the time of handing out the pass. Passes must be vehicle specific.

D) Charge each Howe Island land owner a special ferry assessment in order to maintain our ferry service. Such an assessment should have the effect of reducing the fare for an annual pass. For owners of parcels of land having an assessed value under a fixed amount, say for example \$25,000, no such fee would be charged. For owners with multiple holdings of not more than three parcels, one assessment would be charged if all holdings are registered in the same name; each additional holding above three would be assessed. Part of the assessment would be applied to reduce the annual pass and part would be paid into a special operating fund to maintain the ferry service or into a capital fund to eventually replace the Township ferry.

We are taking this opportunity to make suggestions for improving the ferry service, some of which are:

- 1) School bus ferry service should be reviewed with the relevant school Boards with a view to reducing the number of school buses using the ferry service. Currently it appears there are four buses being used to carry very few children per bus.
- 2) The recent record high water has disrupted ferry service. Consideration should be given to making adjustments to the docks at the Township and County ferries to better accommodate changing water levels without a resulting disruptions in service.
- 3) Consideration should be given to installing cameras at each ferry to give ferry users a real time view of line ups. With internet hook-up, users could view line-ups and decide which ferry to use and whether to postpone or delay trips. In addition or alternatively, wait times could be posted on the electronic boards at each ferry.

Our suggestions regarding fares and regarding improvements to service are not exhaustive and are listed here in no particular order of preference. There is no doubt that all these suggestions (and likely many others) must be carefully analyzed in terms of cost and budget impacts and in terms of fairness to the residents and landowners of the Island and other users of the ferry service.

We look forward to receiving your comments and working with you in this regard. Please let us know if you have any questions. We will post this letter and your response on the HIRA website.

Brian Humphrys
Chair
Howe Island Ratepayers Association