

City seeks way out of homecare dilemma

SHERI MURPHY

Of The News

The city views home care service as a priority item and will do all it can to ensure seniors are not left out in the cold, says Ald. Lyle Flynn, Finance Committee chairman.

But the financial help, if Council agrees to dig up extra funds, will only be "a stop-gap measure for this year's budget," Flynn said in an interview Friday.

Long-term budget problems and the future of home care services are issues that must be dealt with by the province, Flynn noted.

Hearing about recent cuts by the Medicine Hat Health Unit to the city's homecare program, MLA Jim Horsman has asked for a review of the board's budget by Social Services and Community Health Minister Neil Webber.

Webber told The News Friday he does not understand how the board could have spent most of its home care budget in the first four months of this fiscal year when the province has increased funding here by almost 33 per cent in the last two years.

The minister said he feels the program is an important one and he will work quickly to see how budget problems can be rectified.

Meanwhile, Flynn said, the city will continue to discuss the problem with Health Unit officials and see if there is some way to circumvent the cuts in service.

If they decide to cut back there is nothing we can do about it.'

— Ald. Lyle Flynn



It is the city that provides the home-help, handyman services and Meals-on-Wheels programs for seniors, but it does so at the request of the Health Unit who is responsible for these programs, Flynn explained.

"If they decide to cut back there is nothing we can do about it," said Flynn, adding the city has tried to find a compromise price which could save the programs.

The handyman and home-help services are purchased from the city by the Health Unit at a cost of \$13.57 an hour and Meals-on-Wheels is purchased for about \$5-a-meal, he said.

Having spent about \$4 per cent of its budget within the first four months, the Health Unit board is telling the city it cannot provide the same level of service any longer and has cancelled the handyman and home-help programs and will cut the number of meals purchased in half.

"Mrs. (Jean) Franklin (Health Unit Board Chairman) is suggesting the city may be charging too much for these services, and maybe she is right," said Flynn. But the city has already set its budget for the year and cannot accede to the board's request to charge only \$5 or \$6-an-hour for \$13.57-services and reduce meals to \$2 instead of \$5, he added.

"We are not in a position to do it, it would double our deficit," said Flynn. By deficit,

Flynn means the city is already subsidizing the program with \$37,650 in city funds this year, when technically it is not the city's responsibility to do so.

However, the city does have a little flexibility within its support services budget to try to provide more hours of service for the number of hours the Health Unit had planned to purchase, said Flynn.

This measure, and the possibility of directing funds from other budget areas is something Council will discuss during its special meeting Monday, said Flynn.

If it is true the city is charging too much money for the service, it may have to look to the private sector for a contract in future years, said Flynn. "I'm not sure if a private firm could offer the same quality of service, but often the private sector can do these things for less than it costs the public sector," he noted.

Flynn said he would rather see the Health Unit apply new needs criteria to the program "so we don't have to penalize the needy because we cannot provide equally for the seniors who can afford it."

But the Health Unit must follow the "goofy regulations" set by the province and provide subsidized service to all people over 65 whether

they need it or not, said Flynn.

"They (Health Unit officials) told me their hands are tied."

Flynn said he knows there are seniors who would be pleased to get less of a subsidy for the service if it means those who have no money would not do without.

"But those are provincial regulations and there is nothing we can do about them."

Part of the problem, said Flynn, is Medicine Hat has a high number of seniors and as long as all seniors qualify for some kind of subsidization, demand for the services will continue to grow.

That is basically the Health Unit's biggest problem, said Flynn, there are more seniors than funds to provide for them.

Flynn echoes concerns expressed by Horsman and Webber that the board should not be making such drastic cuts with eight months left to go in the budget year.

"I don't understand how they could get in that predicament," he said, budgets should be updated and scrutinized on a regular basis so public bodies cannot get into financial problems that serious, he added.

"I'm disappointed in what's happened, everyone is. We will do what we can to help," he said.

Stampede queen named tonight

Contestants speak out

ANGELA STUBBS

Of The News

Satiated with good food provided by the Ladies Auxiliary to the Medicine Hat Legion family, friends and guests settled themselves down Friday evening to listen to the speeches presented by the five contestants in the Stampede Queen contest.

The queen will be crowned tonight at a public dance in the Cypress Centre. The dance begins at 9 and the crowning will take place about 11.

First to speak Friday was Bernice Pederson. She told the listeners, in a light-hearted manner, about life on a farm and a dream come true.

Public speaking, she said, is not one of her finer qualities so she'd stick with something she enjoyed — working on the Aldo Pederzoli farm.

"I've never been the same since I met the Pederzolis," she grinned.

Life on the farm was, through trial and error, a learning experience but she improved with time.

By Grade 12 she knew what she wanted to do, and Aldo by this time even let her feed the chickens.

"I liked working with animals. I knew I wanted to be a vet and I'm enrolled in the pre-veterinary course this fall.

"Work was a great experience and very educational. I learned patience with Aldo. But now the fun has come to an abrupt halt — seven years down the road my dream will come true."

Lea Hoath asked to be excused if she sneezed or coughed, but she did neither. What she did do, however, was talk about Katimavik.

It's a nine-month program for single people ages 17 to 21, she told the crowd of 120.

"It's split into three, three-month segments which you spend in different provinces including a French speaking one. You are put into groups of 13 with a leader who is your confidant, friend and sometimes referee."

She added that participants are encouraged to be bilingual and through the program they learn to get along and be comfortable with people. Privacy however, can sometimes be a bit of a problem.

You work, for \$1 a day, at jobs as diverse as renovations to babysitting.

"You learn about the culture and recreation of the community you are billeted in."

"It is a fantastic learning experience, but it's not for everyone."

She ended by encouraging others to try the Katimavik experience.

Debbie Munroe divulged some of her family's history when she talked about growing up in Ontario.

"My first years were spent on a dairy farm, and I spent my time talking to the cows."

Then they moved to her grandmother's house, and she guesses that's where her sister got the idea she'd like to be a hairdresser — grandma ran a beauty salon out of the back room.

Next the family moved to Estevan, Sask.

"It was difficult leaving family and friends and I was really sad to leave my pony (she'd been given one when she was six years old).

"My friends back home asked if the Prairies were really flat and if you could see for miles, I told



Lea Hoath, one of five competitors in the Stampede Queen contest, found one her questions in the impromptu session after the speeches Friday, rather amusing.

The three personality judges, Harvey Speers, Kathy McKinley and Betty Chisholm, came up with a variety of questions from etiquette to boys with an even balance of light and serious ones.

them they were, but it's gorgeous."

Saskatoon later became home. The journey there was not too pleasant, it was 40 below and the four of them, plus the dog, were packed like sardines in the family truck.

But they survived and now Medicine Hat is home.

"I'm glad we moved here. We look upon ourselves as Westerners now, and we're proud to be part of the city."

The life of a barrel racer is not easy, said Carla McDonald. You need a lot of equipment and a horse with a lot of heart, warmth and speed that is able to handle itself in difficult situations.

The most popular horses for barrel racing are the quarter horse or the thoroughbred.

"You should feed it three times a day, but never before a race. They should have plenty of water. And if they won't drink it, add some Kool-Aid."

"Appreciate the run a barrel racer makes because it's not as easy as it looks."

The last speaker was Wendy Armstrong, who started off making a joke of her lack of height and went on to talk about the colorful past of a lady.

A lady who is community-minded. Who started the first swim program for students at the Georges P. Vanier School and was a part time explorer leader.

Then she slowed down but did not stop. She bowed and became the Hat's first lady master bowler and master instructor.

"In 1983, she received the Centennial Sports award.

"But before then she adopted other people's daughters when she became co-ordinator of the Stampede Queen contest — that was 15 years ago."

She talked about one of the Hat's queens going on to become Miss Rodeo Canada, Susan Hargrave, and how the contest has changed.

"The contestants owe her a great deal."

This, she added, is the story of a woman who gave of herself and a woman she's proud to call her friend — Laurie Sharland.

It's rare indeed that this lively lady is speechless, but Friday she was.

"This is such a surprise, I'm bowled over," she said, surreptitiously wiping the tears from her eyes.

The impromptu questions and answers added a lively ending to the evening.



Wendy Armstrong, right, looks just a little nervous as she talks to Tracey Schlenker, 1984 Stampede princess, prior to the speeches at the Medicine Hat Legion, Friday. Speeches are a big part of the personality section of the competition and they always make the girls nervous. However, the knots will be in the stomach again this evening as they wait to find out who will be crowned the 1985 Stampede Queen and princesses.

—News photo Mike Fiala

MLAs to discuss Health Unit

Medicine Hat MLA Jim Horsman says he has arranged to meet officials of the Medicine Hat Health Unit Monday to get more information on the cutbacks to home care services.

"I will meet Al Hyland and Tom Musgrave, other MLAs in the Health Unit district, and we will get a briefing from the chairman of the Health Unit board (Jean Franklin)," Horsman said Friday.

The Monday meeting will give the members a chance to hear the whole story instead of picking up facts here and there, he said, "so we can discuss what we can do," he said.

Horsman said he will remain in touch with Social Services and Community Health Minister Neil Webber, who is directing a review of the Health Unit's budget to try and determine why there is a problem with funds.

Webber has said the province will look at the need for more funds if a lack of money is the problem, but he and Horsman say they do not feel the problem could be inadequate funding when the province has increased the Health Unit's home care budget by about 33 per cent in the last few years.

Gordon Wright Seniors shut out

No wonder they were trying to hide.

A month ago it was the old heave ho for a News reporter trying to cover budget discussions at the Health Unit board.

Evidently board members felt more comfortable doing public business behind closed doors and supported Redcliff representative Coun. Everett Burk's motion to close the meeting June 18.

The doors were slammed shut behind our scribe when the Health Unit was setting the budget that brought cuts in services for seniors and the handicapped.

Now we know why they were avoiding us.

This week the community was in a flap when service cuts were abruptly announced — Meals on Wheels visits were reduced, bathing assistance was cut back, homecare services were eliminated and handyman services disappeared.

Letters and phone calls went out at the beginning of the week and cuts were made at the end of the week.

The whole effort was an insult to the people who used the services and the taxpayers who financed them.

Some workers who helped seniors with cleaning didn't even know about the cuts until they were told by the elderly individuals.

Senior citizens, city hall bureaucrats and politicians all wanted to know why there was no advance warning.

They could have read about it a month ago if the board members had been open about their budget deliberations.

But a month ago board chairman Jean Franklin told The News: "We feel it is better to discuss it in camera."

Readers knew there was a possibility of cutbacks although board representatives would ultimately say very little about what was in the budget they approved that day.

At the open part of the meeting Burk said the program "got away from us."

Medicine Hat representative Ald. Karen Green

said she was concerned that if the deficit was made up from homecare funds it might cause hardship to residents involved in the program.

"If you're going to knock \$50,000 out of the program, there will be a cutback in services," Health Unit executive director Audrey Redmond said at the time. "That doesn't say you'll leave a lot of people out there with a great need, but there will be a cutback in services."

The budget was passed, but all The News could pry from the board's hands was a single page of figures showing the health unit was considering a budget of \$3,196,466 for 1985-86 and \$3,473,339 for '86-'87.

The chairman refused to release the budget until it went to Edmonton for approval.

Now, angry senior citizens who have come to rely on Health Unit sponsored helpers are forced to hastily come up with other means of getting assistance around their homes.

Soon after the letters went out, city MLA Jim Horsman started receiving calls from angry citizens.

"It came as a complete surprise to me," said Horsman who called on Social Services and Community Health Minister Neil Webber to review the matter.

Horsman said Webber had no notification either, and: "Dr. Webber is just as concerned as I am and said he will do a thorough review of the budget immediately."

Webber, who says he is committed to home care programs, is now looking at the Health Unit's budget and examining his options.

City Council will consider the problem at a special meeting Monday afternoon.

Finance Chairman Ald. Lyle Flynn says there may be enough flexibility within the Community Services budget to come up with a stop-gap solution to the immediate problem, if Council approves.

Everyone is scrambling to find hasty solutions because a publicly funded body would not work and plan in public.

"In a democratic society, when boards are considering public funds they should be open to public scrutiny," Franklin admitted a month ago.

"But I'm also saying that when boards want to move into camera, that's okay."

If the seven Health Unit board members ducked behind closed doors to avoid controversy, the joke is on them.

Now they really have a reason to hide.



BACK IN BUSINESS — The beer bottle business, that is. Gordon Drybrough, executive director of Redi Enterprises, is just one of the people relieved that the two-month strike by brewery workers at Carling O'Ke