

Big community development decisions at Wollaston

By Jim Eadie

There has been a lot of discussion and hand wringing about community development around the council table over the past few years, but now Wollaston Township council has decided to jump in with both feet and move ahead. Following a presentation to council by Chris Drost of Grant Writing Solutions, they committed to spending \$1,600 up front to apply for a federal and provincial grant to establish a sustainable and workable plan for the municipality's healthy future.

"All communities have lots of assets," Drost told council. "Instead of thinking about what needs there are, think about what you already have first. Everyone has something to offer, and we have to build on that. Inventory the people you have first: your people assets - their skills, experiences and connections. All sorts of people will have things to offer, and ideas for community based projects," she said. "But there will also be opportunities for business projects as well."

As two successful local examples of mobilizing community skills, experiences and connections, she cited the Bancroft railway station project, and the North Hastings Community Fish Hatchery.

Drost recommended spending the initial money to apply for two grants that would allow a person to be hired by the municipality for 20 hours a week, beginning in September of this year and running through 2017. This would cost approximately \$40,000, including expenses.

Drost was upbeat about the municipality's prospects of success accessing funding from Community Futures Development Corporation (CFDC) and the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) rural economic development fund. If successful, the municipality would be required to contribute at least 10 per cent, which would amount to approximately \$4000. "This is a minimal cost with an opportunity to mobilize your community," said Drost.

Drost is confident the township would hear before September about their applications. Council voted unanimously to spend the \$1,600 up-front to start the ball rolling.

Linda Patterson, president of the Tri-County Optimist Club who was present at the meeting, expressed her concern about the unavoidable September start-up date, noting that work has to be done immediately to secure funding for Canada Day and beyond for this year. The local Optimist Club, chartered in 2014 and covering Limerick and Tudor-Cashel as well as Wollaston, has been very active in the community. Optimists have organized events such as Canada Day celebrations, night Christmas parade, soap box derby, bicycle rodeo with children's parade, Easter egg hunts, and the Halloween haunted house at the fire hall.

"This year we plan to raise and spend \$9,000 on community events," she later told Bancroft This Week. "We plan to make our events even bigger and better. I am very happy with what the township is doing, and we want to be part of that - but I am just thinking about the time between now and then." Council agreed to support the Optimist Club with a donation of \$2,000.

On another high note, municipal clerk Jennifer Cohen announced the township has been successful in obtaining \$1.13 million in provincial funding to improve The Ridge Road, Steenburg Lake Road, and the Nicholson bridge.

In other news, union and non-union employee wages have been settled with a 4-year union contract, which includes a two per cent increase for the first year, and smaller increases for the following three years. Also included in the agreements are a \$500 signing bonus.

Councillor Michael Fuerth noted that there is a surplus of \$9,000 in the building fund at present. The money has been collected from issuance of building permits, and the fund is designed to be revenue neutral whereby the money collected should cover the building official's wages. "Could we drop the cost of permits to encourage development?" he accordingly asked. "It might have an impact." "Where would be the best place to apply it?" asked Reeve Graham Blair. "Septic repairs? Being proactive, that might be the biggest need."

"Yes, it would encourage septic repairs," said Fuerth, "and it would work to support local contractors."

Treasurer Verna Brundage will bring back recommendations to council at the next meeting, as there are fluctuations in that account that would need to be considered.