

Candidates face off in Hastings Highlands



By **Mike Riley**

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The Hastings Highlands Interlake Association hosted an all candidates meeting at Emond Hall at the HH municipal office on Oct. 8 from 9:30 a.m. to noon. All the candidates were present, and one of the organizers, Bonny McCleery Scanlan, said after the meeting she thought the event went very well.

On Oct. 8, an all-candidates meeting, hosted by the HH Interlake Association, was held at Emond Hall and ran from 9:30 a.m. to noon. Moderated by Interlake Association volunteer Marlin Horst, it was organized to assist the community to make a more informed choice about who they'll vote for in the upcoming election.

One of the organizers, Ann Judson, said that the Interlake Association had organized an all-candidates meeting back in 2018. They were doing so again, as no other organizations were available to provide a public venue for such a meeting.

The HH Interlake Association is an umbrella organization representing seven lake associations whose members are both permanent and seasonal property owners committed to ensuring that their lake-based economy remains viable for the future.

Judson says that the format for the all-candidates meeting provides candidates with the opportunity to make both opening and closing comments (timed at one minute), and answering questions prepared by the moderator and the community (timed at two minutes).

All 12 candidates were present on Oct. 8, and Tammy Davis, acclaimed as deputy mayor, was also there to answer questions. The mayoral candidates are; current Councillor Tony Fitzgerald, current Deputy Mayor Dorothy Gerrow and Frank Hickey. The candidates running for councillor are; current Councillor Keith Buck, Roger Davis, current Mayor Tracy Hagar, current Councillor Nancy Matheson, Joan Nieman, Sheila Schruder, Grant Scott and current Councillor Alex Walder.

The mayoral candidates gave their introductions first. Fitzgerald is a life-long resident of the area and still operates a family farm where he grew up. He taught school for 35 years in Bancroft, was a volunteer firefighter and coached minor hockey. Elected to council in 2018, he was chair of the committee of adjustment for the past four years and his team made consistent and practical

policies to spur development.

?I would like to use those skills to lead those elected to the new council to make decisions that are reasonable, affordable and sustainable. When I'm at the council table, I don't make decisions for the seven people there or you people. I make them for your grandchildren and mine. I was privileged growing up here and I want my grandchildren to have the same opportunities I had. The true test of leadership is the ability to inspire people to follow you. No one can do it alone and it takes a strong team working with a strong leader. I believe I have the experience, skills and personality to be that leader,? he says.

Hickey was born and raised on a farm in HH, educated locally and has lived on Mink Lake for 19 years. He's been active as a volunteer in the community and worked for 35 years in the financial services industry.

?I believe this gives me a good background to represent all of the residents of Hastings Highlands,? he says.

Gerrow was born in Port Perry and raised seasonally in Haliburton. She's a retired legal assistant after almost 30 years and she says she's always available for her constituents to answer phone calls and emails.

?I'll never tell you what you want to hear, but I'll always tell you the truth. I will not disclose matters that have to be kept confidential. I strive to live with Integrity and I'm making a commitment to you and whatever time is needed to be your mayor so you and this municipality are my priority. I'm a very strong advocate and plan to do some of my best work over the next four years. I have the skills to use the technology and means to communicate with our upper tier levels of government and all of you. I want council to use forward thinking to make improvements as that is the only way to progress financially and to continue to provide services to accommodate our residents,? she says.

Davis, acclaimed as deputy mayor, told everyone she'd gotten sage advice on her new duties from her father, who has a wealth of municipal political experience, council members and her colleagues at Bancroft hospital. She takes the role very seriously and will work with the mayor and council to represent the needs and rights of all people in HH. She said there are tough issues before the municipality like the repairs needed on Hwy 62, more support and investment needed for the fire department, waterfront and shorelines that need to be protected, regulated short-term rentals in HH, and reviewing bylaws to make them reflective and realistic for residents.

?I believe that the municipalities in North Hastings also need to work together to get assistance from upper tier levels of government. So, my recommendation to the mayor is to work as a team with North Hastings to gain services for HH,? she says.

The councillor candidates then gave their introductions. Buck has called HH home for over a decade and he and his wife rejuvenated an old farm in the area. He's been active in many community efforts such as the Business Retention and Expansion Program and the Disaster Relief Committee among others, and is the co-vice chair of the Bancroft Area Stewardship Council.

?For more than a year I have had the privilege to serve our community as an appointed member of council. In this capacity I have never shied away from championing causes or asking the tough questions about the future of our fire services, taxation, tourism and economic development, affordable and available housing as well as the fair and impartial delivery of municipal services to our community,? he says.

Davis said he's been in HH for over 60 years and is now retired. He'd been part of the municipality's waste management committee and property standards appeals committee and attended council meetings regularly, both in person and via Zoom.

?I am very involved in my community and care about its future. I would like to bring your voices to the table to be heard. I have heard some interesting ideas but I believe change is needed. This election is your first step in making those changes. I am asking that you vote and that you vote for someone who will stand up for your issues and bring the to the table. I know that candidate is me. I don't have to be your first choice but I'd like to be one of your choices on election day,? he says.

Hagar is the current mayor of HH, and has been on council since 2014. She is an active volunteer in the community and has organized several local events. She has owned a local business for the past 12 years. She has taken a lead in initiatives like the grant writing committee and the three-way partnership with the North Hastings Children's Services and the Algonquin people to bring a childcare centre, Indigenous centre and outdoor market space to downtown Maynooth.

?I hope to have the opportunity to continue to serve my community. I have spent the last 18 months filling in as mayor after the resignation of the mayor elect and I have enjoyed my time in these roles and have learned a lot. We have been proactive with delegations to various ministers and parliamentary assistants on issues and concerns that affect HH and I feel I have made good connections with these delegations as well as our MP and MPP. At this time, I am asking for your support as your councillor representative,? she says.

Matheson has been on council for the past 10 years and has been a HH resident for 27 years. She has been a local business owner for 12 years and has been involved in various committees.

?I have a personal vested interest in helping our community grow responsibly into the future. I am energetic, dedicated and always research and listen to all viewpoints before making a decision. There will be tough decisions ahead for council and I'm prepared to put the energy into producing the best sustainable results. My platform aligns with the municipality's vision of an enviable community. I reduced the tax levy by one percent by moving to allocate \$75,425.58 from modernization funding and I also moved to allocate \$539,851 from modernization funding to the fire reserves, and other initiatives. I would be honoured to continue to represent you and respectfully ask for your support to elect me as councillor to help plan and shape our community,? she says.

Nieman is retired from the municipality after 21 years and is proud to call HH home. She has 30 plus years experience in municipal work, and she decided to run in the upcoming election because she felt she'd be a great team member with her previous experience.

?I believe I'd have the knowledge and wisdom to be a member of your council. I want to commit to you people and everyone else and I'm going to try to do the best I can. I want to be here to be your voice and voice those opinions to council. I can't make any promises I won't keep. I'm hoping the seven of us can work together as a team and make it better for all of us in HH,? she says.

Schruder grew up in Lake St. Peter and has lived in the area most of her life. She's called Maynooth home for the past 39 years. She worked at a Scotiabank in Maynooth for 26 years and raised a son as a single mom so she feels she knows how to manage money. She has volunteered at the library and at Maynooth Public School.

?I feel I have good communication skills and could make a good contribution to council. I have a lot to learn but I care about my community and I'd like to be part of council, if possible,? she says.

Scott worked for 30 years at General Motors and retired to his cottage on Lake St. Peter in 2005. He has volunteered in the community with the Breakfast Club at Maynooth Public School.

?I wish to get on council to help out my constituents. My position in running for council is helping people with building problems and making sure road maintenance is maintained. My road is terrible with potholes. That's my position now,? he says.

Walder was born in post-war Hungary and came to Canada with his parents at 11 years old. After learning English and pursuing his post-secondary education, he worked as an educator before retiring in HH 20 years ago.

?I'm seeking support to be re-elected as councillor. New and ongoing issues will have to be addressed. My commitment is to work hard on your behalf and to be a strong voice to challenges that arise. I have the credibility, the will and the experience to deliver. I'm for sound financial management, necessary and only minimal property tax burden, enhancing the fire services, sound reserves accumulation, eliminating current municipal debt, finding efficiencies in our system, a safe and healthy environment and economic development. The best predictor of future success is past performance and our contributions are well known,? he says.

Questions asked of the candidates ranged from how to maintain the health of the municipal lakes and waterways, which septic reinspection programs being implemented was the most common answer, the funding of HH fire services and equipment going into the future, which they replied was putting money into the fire reserves over time and contemplating special levies (versus tax increases) to pay for this over the next 10 to 15 years approximately, and the top three priorities facing the next council, which among the candidates were roads, fire services, waste services, infrastructure maintenance and the continued health of the municipal lakes.

Other questions included whether the candidates would be in favour of allowing rental units on single property dwellings to help local businesses find and keep staff so they'll have a place to live (they said they would within reason), the most frequent bylaw infractions (noise being the most common answer) and what social media accounts each candidate has (they varied with each candidate).

After all the questions had been asked, closing remarks from the candidates were heard. Horst then took the opportunity to thank all the candidates who were running for council.

?It is in many ways a thankless job because whatever you do, someone thinks you've made the wrong decision. I think it's very brave for people to take on that responsibility,? he says. ?So again, thank you all.?