

Census shows many county homes are low-income

By Sarah Sobanski

One in five homes in Hastings County are considered low-income, according to the newest census release. Limerick, Tudor and Cashel, and Bancroft hold some of the highest percentages of low-income households.

Earlier this month, StatsCan released income demographics for households across Canada. These figures are based on 2015 wages. The median household income nationwide rose around 11 per cent from \$55,118 after taxes in 2005 to a little more than \$61,348 in 2015. In Ontario, the median after-tax income went from \$61,659 to \$65,285 – around a six per cent increase.

The median household income after taxes in Hastings County was \$54,900 in 2015. Limerick's median household income was \$42,880, making it the lowest earning township of the county's 14 member municipalities. Tudor and Cashel had a median household income of \$45,952 and Bancroft had a median household income of \$46,336.

The highest was Tyendinaga, not including the native reserve, at \$81,408. The median on the Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory was about half that.

Bancroft This Week spoke to county Warden Rodney Cooney after the release. He said he hadn't seen the results yet, but he wasn't surprised by what the paper had found.

“Of all the counties in Ontario, that aren't included in the northern counties, Hastings has been the lowest income per capita for over 100 years? It's actually [also] the [least healthy]? in all of southern Ontario,” said Cooney.

Limerick also had the highest percentage of low-income homes in the county – almost a third of the 155 households that participated in the census. Tudor and Cashel followed close behind at 28 per cent of the 270 surveyed. Bancroft came in third, despite having six times the sample size. Of 1,750 households a quarter were low-income. Wollaston also came in at around 25 per cent. Hastings Highlands sat at 18 per cent.

The percentage average of low-income households after taxes between county members was 20 per cent.

“You take places that have lakes and rivers in the north, all those people work elsewhere,” Cooney noted suggesting there wasn't enough industry in rural Ontario to support higher income jobs. He also said cottagers would record their incomes for the census at their permanent residences.

He added, “Those private businesses have to make their money in five or six months and then they've got five or six months of not much traffic flow. It's just the nature of our county, it's the nature of the beast? There's not much mining going on right now? And as far as agriculture goes, most farms are bigger but they have less employees, they're doing it with machinery.”

“For a one-person household, the after-tax low-income measure is \$22,133. For larger households, this amount is adjusted upward by multiplying it by the square root of household size,” states the census. For two people the low-income threshold is \$31,301, for three it's \$38,335, for four it's \$44,266, for five it's \$49,491, for six it's \$54,215 and for seven it's \$58,558 after taxes.

These numbers mean more children living in low-income homes as well.

According to the census, more than half of children in Tudor and Cashel are living in low-income households. In Limerick it's 40 per cent. In Marmora and Lake it's only five per cent lower.

The numbers don't look much better in other parts of the county. Besides Tyendinaga, almost a fifth or more children in each of the 14 member municipalities live in low-income homes. For Bancroft, Wollaston and Deseronto about a third of children live in low-income homes. In Carlow-Mayo it's 18.5 per cent, Faraday, Centre Hasting and Stirling-Rawdon 20 per cent, Hastings Highlands and Madoc 23 per cent.

“Children are defined here as the population in private households younger than 18 years of age,” reads the census.

Cooney said the county has been trying to bring down these percentages for a 100 years.

“There's never been a large industry that's stayed for last 100 years. They come and go but you don't got anybody employing that 150 to 200 people? As far as government services they're all comparable to the rest of Ontario but we just have so many people that are either on assistance or either on private business trying to make a go of it.”