

Coe Hill Riders looks to extend land use agreement

By Bill Kilpatrick

In 2019, according to information by the Coe Hill Riders ATV club, the Township of Wollaston signed a non-exclusive land use agreement with the Ontario Federation of All Terrain Vehicles covering the township owned multi-use rail trail, from Wollaston Lake Road to the Old Hastings Road, with Coe Hill Riders ATV, as the local club, assigned to maintain the trail. The agreement saw all maintenance taken care of by the Coe Hill ATV club with no cost to the municipality along with \$15-million of liability insurance which is paid by the club. In a letter to Wollaston council, dated March 8, the ATV club was requesting a renewal of the land use agreement for another five years beginning on April 1 and running until April 1, 2029. Councillor Paul Ordanis, speaking to the motion had this to say, 'I want to start off by saying that the Coe Hill Riders ATV club does a tremendous amount for the community and exposes us to people from outside our community [?] who can become future residents. They also do a lot of volunteer work and donate to the library and other worthwhile causes. The only consideration with respect to this contract, and the ATV club, that does concern me somewhat, is that signs have emerged along the rail trail that promotes exclusive use of that trail by the ATV club through the summer months and this trail used to be a multi-use trail for everybody in the township. And my concern is that we are seeing an increasing number of ATVs and recreational vehicles using Hwy 620 and I'm beginning to get concerned that this may be because these people do not have the appropriate pass to use the multi-use trail any longer. [?] I think it needs to be clear in the contract whether or not this is exclusive use of that trail or if we are a multi-use trail.' Councillor Currie also raised concerns about the state of the trail being multi-use stating, 'You hear questions about, you know, if you see the sign and think, 'I can't be here,' but it is supposed to be a multi-use trail. So, I think it would be useful to have a discussion about that.' Another concern that was raised by Ordanis was the enforcement of the trail permits. Councillor J.D. Fentie, then spoke to this concern stating that the issue was raised at the most recent meeting of the Bancroft and Area Community Policing Advisory Committee. Fentie went on to say that, 'There is a clear difference between snowmobile trails and ATV trails because under provincial legislation, I think, police are required to police snowmobile trails, but there's no such edict for ATV trails and every ATV trail system seems to have different rules. The comment that was made was that it was very difficult for the police to be involved because they really don't know what the rules are and they haven't been given a clear mandate to police it.' Fentie also raised another issue concerning public input into the use of the trail. He said, 'To the point of this being such a significant asset in the township and [since] we're talking about what we are going to do with this for the next period of time, I think it would be worthwhile giving the public an opportunity to have input. This isn't an urgent thing, as the trail cannot be used until the beginning of May anyway and if need be, we could extend the contract on a short-term basis until we get through the public consultation process. It's been made very clear that public consultation is an important thing and I think we all agreed to that coming into council that we wanted the public involved. I think that this is a prime example of taking one of the biggest most important assets we have and giving the public a chance to have their input, and that includes the executive of the Coe Hill Riders ATV club as well.' Council agreed to renew the land use agreement between Wollaston Township and the ATV club for three months beginning on April 1 to June 30 and directed the CAO to 'set up an examination agreement with the ATV club with public input.' No details were discussed regarding the public consultation process or how the municipality would seek public input other than through delegations to council. Bancroft This Week reached out to Darren Stevens, the president of the Coe Hill Riders ATV club for comment. Stevens said that he had no comment as the members of the club's executive committee needed to meet to decide on a course of action, but he did point out that most of, if not all of, the questions raised by council could be answered by looking at the ATV club's welcome letter that was sent to council and accepted as information at the Dec 12, 2022 meeting. The letter points out that the ATV trails are monitored by the OPP SAVE team, Snowmobile, ATV and Vessel Enforcement team, who conduct RIDE checks, monitor safety, and check for insurance of those using the trails. In terms of policing for permits the letter stated that when the issue was discussed with the OPP prior to 2021, 'The OPP requested that language be provided in a Wollaston township by law that speaks to the requirement for an ATV permit to use the trail that also identifies the ATV organization's whose permits are allowed on the township owned trail. Coe Hill Riders recommended that the bylaw should specify that the Ontario Federation of All Terrain Vehicles, the Eastern Ontario Trails Alliance, the Kawartha ATV Association, and the Haliburton ATV Association permits for ATV's are accepted on the Township owned multi-use rail trail. The OPP recommended that signage should be also posted on the trail to reflect that an ATV permit is required and indicate which ATV permits are permitted.' Steven's said that with the passage of by law 05-2021, a by law to regulate the use of off-road vehicles within the township of Wollaston, the ATV club then went out and purchased signs for the trails that made it easier

for the OPP to enforce permit infractions since they know what permits are required and accepted on the trails. The bylaw stated that, "Permit means a trail access pass purchased by one of the following ATV Organizations to allow for travel on the Township owned multi-use trail: Ontario Federation of All Terrain Vehicles, the Eastern Ontario Trails Alliance, the Kawartha ATV Association, and the Haliburton ATV Association," and adds that "The municipal corporation of the Township of Wollaston deems it necessary to ensure that a permit is required for use of the multi-use trail." While the 2019 land use agreement with the Coe Hill Riders does not state that the trail is a multi-use trail it also does not state that the trail is exclusively for ATVs only. However, the off-road vehicle by law does clearly state that the trail is a "township owned multi-use trail." Stevens further pointed out that there are multiple signs along the trail that state that the trail is a "multi-use" trail. Former Mayor Lynn Kruger, who was attending the meeting spoke during the public question period and had this to say, "As far as the ATV trail goes there is signs that say multi-purpose trail. The only people that they are dinging on the trail are people who don't have permits for their bikes. People can still walk it, they can still ride their horses on it, people can still use it as needed and if there ever is an emergency in there, they are the best cleared trails for emergency vehicles to get down. I don't understand why there is such confusion on all this. [?] I think it's a really bad move to try and obsolete this group from doing anything here. It's ridiculous. They're trying to help and they are helping in so many capacities around, not just in Wollaston but in the North Kawarthas.[?] I think we really need to be careful what we do with this group because this group helps this community substantially."