

Council considers seeking legal advice on county's bylaw template

By Nate Smelle

Hastings Highlands Councillor Alex Walder has submitted a notice of motion appearing on the agenda at council's March 17 meeting which, if approved, will direct staff to request professional legal advice on Hastings County's Exotic Animal Bylaw template.

The template was created by Hastings County's Planning and Development committee after Hastings Highlands council requested assistance with establishing a bylaw to regulate the keeping of exotic animals at their Nov. 18, 2020 meeting. Council decided to seek the county's help in response to concerns for public safety and animal welfare arising from the community because of a proposed roadside zoo/safari business on Peterson Road.

Hybla resident Roy Mitchell is one of several community members raising awareness of the potential threats to public safety that come with allowing big cats such as lions and tigers to be kept in captivity and used for entertainment. As one of the founding members of Citizens for a Safe and Humane Hastings Highlands, he is keeping a close eye on how the municipality is handling the regulation of exotic animals.

Speaking on behalf of the group, Mitchell said there is a growing number of people organizing in support of the bylaw. Noting that both Mayor Vic Bodnar and Councillor Walder are known to be "fiscally aware of costs"; and that they "like to ensure money isn't wasted," Mitchell said he and the members of Citizens for a Safe and Humane Hastings Highlands are confused regarding why they are spending money to have the county's template vetted by lawyers again.

"This has already been vetted and voted on at the county level and before the other 13 municipalities in the county," declared Mitchell.

"Why go through that again, and to a larger degree? We're all really confused by council, who haven't been forthcoming with any information why they need to pay more money to have it vetted again."

Mitchell said all Citizens for a Safe and Humane Hastings Highlands are asking for from council is leadership. However, for council to act as leaders, he said there also needs to be "communication and clarity."

"We're not seeing that and wondering why lawyers are playing such a role in our municipality when they aren't the people we voted for," added Mitchell.

Rather than paying lawyers for an additional consultation, he said council needs to pass the bylaw crafted by the county, because "it will be good for all parties, and more importantly, ensure that the welfare of the animals and this community are safe and humane."

Bancroft This Week reached out to Councillor Walder for comment regarding his notice of motion, however, he said he would rather address the matter during the meeting, and after it had been dealt with by council. Keep an eye on next week's edition of Bancroft This Week for more on this story as it unfolds.