

Economic development committee catching breath

By Jim Eadie

Serious and real economic development is on Wollaston Township's mind. It recently decided to get assistance in developing a community-based plan and successful grant applications from the federal and provincial governments. Accordingly, the current council assigned two members to the North Hastings Economic Development Committee (NHEDC): Reeve Graham Blair and Deputy Reeve Marilyn Brickles.

Cathy Trimble, NHEDS chairperson, was called to the Wollaston Township regular council meeting on Feb. 25 to update council on the current activities by the committee, which has recently reorganized itself to ensure clear governance and working committees; it has also incorporated itself as a not-for-profit organization.

"We want to achieve sustainable economic growth in North Hastings," she said. "We want to provide a forum through collaboration and partnerships to enhance regional economic development and to advance, assist and foster economic prosperity in North Hastings."

Current participation in the committee includes municipal and county governments, businesses and other community groups such as Loyalist College, Chamber of Commerce and business improvement associations.

Trimble stressed the importance of collaboration between the three groups in encouraging growth and stability of local business, leading to more employment and stronger community viability.

"For example, we have exciting scenic tour routes in our municipalities already established," she said. "Every township has one. Wouldn't it be nice to further interconnect them with other routes and trails?"

Trimble notes that these routes could be connected to historic places in the area, and the entire attraction placed on the county of Hastings GIS mapping system at little or no cost.

Even such things as addressing long-term health care in the region will stimulate economic and community growth. "Do we need another wing on our hospital?" she asked. "What about our extended care? In too many cases in North Hastings, a husband and wife are separated due to illness. We need to look and see, learn the facts - we need to do fact-based research."

Other examples include finding simple and inexpensive ways which facilitate local tourist and tour related businesses attending large trade and tourism related shows in urban areas. Another need is to promote small and diversified local agriculture projects.

"There is a lot that can be done here," Trimble proclaimed. "Let's not apologize for our smallness. Let's celebrate it!"

Hastings Highlands has struck a special task force for their Business Retention and Expansion program that will soon make some announcements.

"Hastings Highlands Unlimited - the Reveal" public meeting will be held at the Hastings Highlands Centre on March 29 at 6:30 p.m.

There will be a summary of the Business Retention and Expansion survey results and recommendations for future development efforts. Summaries will include business climate, future plans, business and workforce development and community development.