

Economic Development Committee to receive training in South Algonquin



By Mike Riley

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South Algonquin Township hasn't had an economic development committee meeting since April, 2022, and some in the community, like the South Algonquin Business Alliance, have been urging council to have such a meeting as soon as possible. This looks to become a reality soon, as according to Mayor Ethel LaValley, there will be an education and training session for the economic development committee on Feb. 21. Councillor Joan Kuliack brought up the economic development committee under new business at the Dec. 6 meeting of council. She said that council had looked at lack of housing, the deleterious effect on local businesses who lack staff, and the various problems and issues with getting new housing built, like increased building costs and lack of land. She thought that with the Official Plan, the Strategic Plan and the Asset Management Plan completed, it was a good time to get started on economic development and begin with some education. "When you look at how vibrant South Algonquin was 20 to 30 years ago and how it is now, you can see the gradual decline. I would think that we as a township would want to start looking into things and what we could do and not do. So, I'm really quite hopeful education would be our first step," she says. CAO Bryan Martin told council that Dr. David Robinson will be conducting the education session on Feb. 21. He said he's an economist with 40 years' experience and is a professor at Nipissing University. He said he took an economic development course from him about a year ago, and said he'd reach out to set up a session for the economic development committee. Dr. Angela Pollak, chair of SABA, wholeheartedly supports training for staff and council in areas of need including economic development and the Municipal Conflict of Interest Act. "Having a trusted source of information provide a baseline understanding of what economic development is and the different roles at play is foundational and would benefit the entire community through increased awareness, understanding and confidence to work together," she says. Pollak says that at this time, SABA has not received any official communication or invitation from the township regarding economic development training taking place. "It is well known that economic development activities require participants from all levels of government, industry, and the wider public to work collaboratively to achieve the common good. We hope the township will find a means of making this training inclusive to the newest member of the economic development committee appointed by SABA [Barney Baker], as well as to all who want to observe. We look forward to learning more about the scope of this training from the township," she says. Councillor Shawn Pigeon, who'll be chairing the economic development committee once it gets going, reiterated that Feb. 21 will be a professional development day with guest speaker Dr. Robinson. "This session is to educate all of council on direction, goals, and how to achieve these goals that will benefit the entire township. Now that our Strategic Plan has been finalized, we can now move forward with many items and economic development is one of them. Mr. Baker will be notified regarding this session," he says. "I'm confident that this is a good beginning for success."