

Hastings Highlands hesitates on fireworks bylaw



Hastings Highlands bylaw enforcement officer Dawn Bowers defends the fireworks bylaw as 'simple and enforceable' after Councillor Nancy Matheson suggests it isn't. / SARAH SOBANSKI Staff

By Sarah Sobanski

Hastings Highlands residents won't be able to set off fireworks in the municipality if a new bylaw passes 'except for on a handful of days.

Council tabled its fireworks restrictions bylaw for the second time April 18. After its first reading it was sent back for amendments and advice from the area's fire chief.

The bylaw would prohibit setting off fireworks except for on New Year's Eve, Victoria Day, Canada Day, Independence Day, the Civic Holiday, Labour Day and the days before and after these holidays. If set off on these days, the person igniting the fireworks has to be supervised if he or she is under 18 years old and fireworks can only be ignited between 8 p.m. and 11 p.m.

After the bylaw's first tabling, bylaw enforcement officer Dawn Bowers told *Bancroft This Week* her research showed setting off fireworks after 8 p.m. was better for wildlife. She said many animals were 'denning' come that time.

The bylaw also aims to protect area lakes from poisonous materials. The new bylaw says fireworks can't be set off within 30 metres of any 'shoreline, vegetation line or building structure.' They also must be 15 metres from people.

Bowers said 30 metres was needed to ensure fallout from fireworks, such as pieces of metal, landed on the property where they were ignited and not in area lakes.

While council seemed to lean towards the bylaw during its first reading, many councillors now seem opposed to it.

Councillor Tracy Hagar said she spoke with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry and others about the potential risks to local lakes from fireworks.

'There really is not a lot to say that there is any damage to the aquatic life,' she said. She suggested the bylaw made fireworks more of a danger for forest fires by having people 100 feet back from the water's edge.

Councillor Nancy Matheson who seconded the original motion for the bylaw said what had been brought forth was not what council had asked for.

'As I said at our last meeting this isn't simple or enforceable,' said Matheson noting this is what council had wanted. She argued it would be hard to identify who was illegally setting off fireworks and that in the time it would take authorities to the scene, the 'violation would likely be over with.'

She said the proposed bylaw conflicted with the municipality's noise bylaw and that updating that bylaw might help with the fireworks issue.

'My suggestion would be a regulation on the permitted time' so people with pets etcetera are aware of the times, because those were the complaints I was receiving. A clear distinction on what is permitted as far as consumer or personal fireworks and at this point in time an educational component with regards to fire hazards, animals, lakes contamination and proper disposal.'

The bylaw would also prohibit pop-up or temporary fireworks vendors without a permit. This includes businesses bringing in special

trailers to sell fireworks on special occasion weekends.

Hagar said she had spoken with business owners since the first reading of the bylaw suspecting the bylaw might negatively impact them.

"When I asked last month if anyone had taken the liberty to speak to any of these folks I was told no, they had plenty of time to come to us if they were concerned," she said. "I took the liberty of speaking with three of those owners myself only to find out they all felt the same way - they were very unhappy with this bylaw."

Linkie General Store co-owner Kyle Linkie was at the meeting with the owner of Maynooth General Store and others. He said fireworks sales contribute greatly to store revenues. Businesses in the area rely on summer business and fireworks are a big part of that, he said.

"You're supposed to be able to come out to the cottage to have fun," he said. "People come to set them off here because they can't in the city. The money you make in the summer gets you through the rest of the year."

At the bylaw's first reading Deputy Mayor Gregg Roberts said the coming of the bylaw had been well advertised and that businesses had yet to come forward with concerns. He asked if businesses who disagreed with the bylaw were going to come clean up the poisonous firework fallout from area lakes the bylaw was trying to guard against.

Roberts was absent from the meeting. He's been an active proponent of the bylaw as it would prohibit binary explosive kits. He's said previously they're a growing problem in the municipality.

Councillor Alex Walder said it wouldn't be fair to vote on the bylaw without Roberts present. Council passed his motion to postpone a decision on the bylaw until May 30.

The average cost of a fine within the bylaw is \$386. The steepest fine could cost you \$610 if you're setting off fireworks during a fire ban or setting off display fireworks without a permit. The least it could cost is \$250 for setting off consumer fireworks in an "unsafe manner."