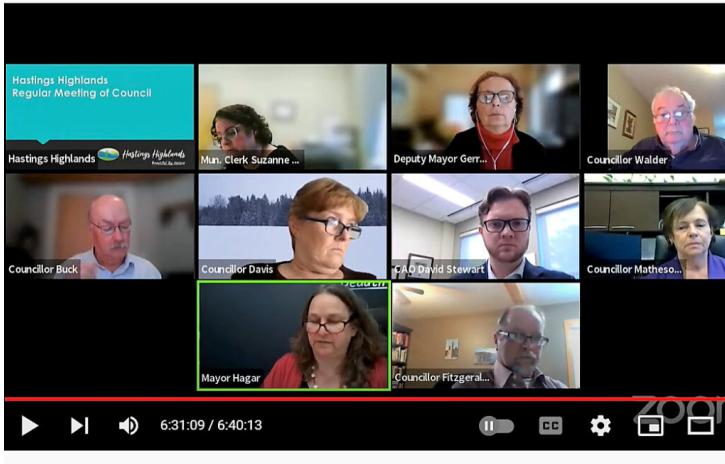


Hastings Highlands in preliminary talks for new Indigenous centre and childcare facility in Maynooth



BY MICHAEL RILEY Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

At their meeting on Jan. 19, Hastings Highlands council received a report from Mayor Tracy Hagar regarding her preliminary talks with The Algonquin Peoples and the North Hastings Children's Services regarding initiating a three-way partnership to support an Indigenous Centre and a Child Care Facility on the grounds of the Maynooth Community Centre. After some discussion, council accepted Hagar's report as information only, and they will begin preliminary steps going forward to realize this initiative, including having NHCS present to council at their February meeting. The origins of Hagar's report go back to the Hastings Highlands council meeting on Aug. 21, 2021. At that meeting council resolved to support the mayor in initiating preliminary talks with The Algonquin Peoples and the NHCS to look into a three-way partnership and what that would look like to support an Indigenous Centre and a Child Care Facility on the grounds of the Maynooth Community Centre. This facility would also have a community kitchen, public washrooms with outside access, an outdoor market space with shelter for bad weather and a stage area for outdoor bands and children's activities. Hagar's report to council also stated that the township would be investigating grant opportunities in the coming year for this project. Meetings have already occurred between Hagar, the Kijicho Manito Madaouskarini Algonquin First Nation Chief Stephen Hunter and Jessica Anderson, the executive director of the NHCS. They came to the conclusion that they would build upon the strengths and diversity of community by having Maynooth as the site of this new project. They identified Maynooth as a vibrant and actively engaged community with community spaces that could be enhanced and strengthened by this project. In addition, Maynooth is on the unceded territory of the Kijicho Manito Madaouskarini Algonquin First Nation, and as such, would include components that are important to them. These would include gathering spaces, cultural activities and a space for the community to learn about Algonquin culture and history. Hagar, Hunter and Anderson agreed that COVID-19 would be a facet of everyone's lives for some time to come, so the new project should take that into account, considering infection control measures in its design and purpose. Examples of these measures include the outdoor spaces, like the outdoor pavilion and the market space. With Maynooth being an area that is in need of licenced child care, this project would fill that need, and consideration of the building requirements in the design is important to the project's success. The funding of this project will be considered as time passes, as there are other components besides building costs that need to be considered. For instance, there will be the cost to demolish and remove the old structure due to the hazardous materials used in its construction. The funding model will also need to be cognizant of operational costs. Going forward, council invited Anderson to speak at their Feb. 16 council meeting. A working group will be created to formulate a plan for moving ahead, and will include Hagar, an additional council member, a Hastings Highlands senior leadership team member, NHCS, the Algonquin First Nation and the Hastings Highlands Public Library. Anderson told Bancroft This Week on Jan. 25 that it's great that Hastings Highlands is looking at options for the space [at the Maynooth community centre grounds]. "NHCS is happy to be a part of the conversation," she says. Hagar also commented on this report and what lies ahead for this nascent Indigenous Centre and Child Centre in Maynooth to Bancroft This Week on Jan. 20. "A few months back, I made a

motion asking for council approval to have preliminary talks. That motion passed. There is really nothing more than was in my report and the next steps that state that we'll be having Jessica [Anderson] to a meeting in the future, she says. There will be more in that meeting as we work to prepare for it.