

## **Hastings Highlands passes 2023 budget with 4.99 per cent increase]**

By Mike Riley

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

At their meeting on April 5, the Municipality of Hastings Highlands passed their 2023 budget with an increase of 4.99 per cent, which was a bit more than the 4.2 per cent that Tanya Dickinson, the treasurer, brought forth to council earlier this year, due to council directing staff to increase the budget by an additional \$100,000 to put toward the reserves. Dickinson comments on the municipality's passage of the 2023 final budget.

At their April 5 meeting, Hastings Highlands council passed their 2023 budget with an increase of 4.99 per cent. Dickinson says that while council had directed staff to find efficiencies within the budget to decrease it from the 4.2 per cent increase proposed initially, at the March 1 meeting, council also instructed staff to increase the budget to allow for an additional \$100,000 to be transferred to the reserves in the budget. That meant that overall, staff ended up presenting a 4.99 per cent tax levy increase, which council approved.

?The 2023 operating budget maintains service levels in 2023, while beginning to prepare for the future by making additional investments into reserves for future planning. The additional \$100,000 of reserve transfers that council approved were directed to the reserve for bridge capital maintenance and reserve for equipment replacement,? she says.

Mayor Tony Fitzgerald introduced Dickinson's report on the final 2023 budget and asked council to accept and approve it pending any further queries or questions. Councillor Tracy Hagar had a question on the municipality's Back the Cat donation of \$25,000, so Deputy Mayor Tammy Davis left the room as she had a conflict of interest on this issue. Hagar asked if Hastings Highlands would be holding on to the funds for this donation until the Back the Cat project was ready to move forward or if it would be released and held somewhere. Dickinson replied that like past council contributions, it would be their intention to release the funds as council had approved this donation in the budget and Back the Cat would hold on to the funding until they were ready to purchase the equipment.

Dickinson says that formal budget and tax rate bylaws will be brought forward at the May 17 regular meeting of council. As for any additional comments, Dickinson says it was a challenging budget to prepare due to many factors affecting it such as increasing insurance rates and many inflationary impacts.

?The 2023 budget followed a similar timeline as it has in past years. Staff will report on the year-to-date budget results to council on a quarterly basis,? she says. ?You can expect the first quarterly report (January to March YTD results) to be presented at the May 17 council meeting as well.?

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