

## Hastings Highlands tax good news

A special meeting of council, including a budget training session with Municipal Affairs, was held on Thurs. Apr. 24 in council chambers. The representative from M A made an excellent presentation on how to manage a budget, explaining that it was council's prerogative to manage their reserves, taking into account the known costs for the year, allocating funds for planned projects, and allowing monies for unforeseen costs. However, she emphasized the total amount needed to be held in reserves 'is your decision.' After this session, treasurer David Stewart revealed the good news that the board of education levy, just received, showed a decrease of 3.59 per cent this year. He presented a print out showing the new figures affecting the tax rate for 2016: municipal 4.66 per cent + County 0.16 per cent, and Bd. Of Ed. minus 3.59 per cent-- leaving a balance of 1.23 per cent.

When I asked if this figure reflects the tax rate for this year, the answer was a resounding 'yes,' and I complimented council on doing extraordinarily well. (A draft budget, previously approved, had a tax increase of 4.76 per cent)

After a recess, council reconvened with a motion by Councillor Matheson, seconded by Councillor Cannon, 'That Council accepts the 4.78 per cent Municipal levy (a final blended rate of 1.23 per cent to appear on the tax bill) as presented by our treasurer.'

Councillor Hagar requested a recorded vote. Of the six members of council present, five voted yes. Roberts did so with a warning that with this low rate, council may have to apply a significant tax increase next year. Councillor Hagar voted no, and the motion was carried.

Only six members of the public were present, but all seemed content with the 1.23 per cent tax increase, which appears in line with the rates set by surrounding municipalities. The mayor allowed questions from the audience during the training session and afterward, and for all present, this informative meeting appeared to end on a high note.

Submitted by Lorraine Fell