

Hastings Highlands works on funding issues

Hastings Highlands received some good and not-so-good news last week from Frank Mills, its Chief Building Official. He reported that while the total number of building permits has fallen, the value of the 25 new permits is up, indicating growth.

Fire chief Pat Hoover brought good news as well, reporting that the joint fire board had a small surplus for the second year in a row. Pat McMunn reported that she is working on a strategic plan for the Hastings Highlands library, which she hopes will also spread more awareness of all its programs and activities. Coming up: the return of potluck and movie nights, as well as a book-sale in early April and a Trivia evening in May.

Council passed the new agreement with Bancroft Community Transit; Mayor Bloom received a note from two regular riders thanking the township for looking after their transportation needs.

Mayor Bloom also reported on the township's discussions with provincial officials at the Rural Ontario Municipalities Conference. The key issue was the request for funding to repair highway 62, a request supported by neighbouring municipalities and by MP Mike Bossio and MPP Todd Smith. The delegation explained to the provincial government rep that even if the work was only done in sections, the town's lack of industry, number of low-income families, and large population of seniors meant the tax burden would fall unfairly. The province was reminded that while highways are only expected to last 25 years before overhaul, this portion of 62 is now over 40 years old.

The other major intergovernmental issue was OPP policing charges, which many small rural townships find ever more oppressive, to the point they are almost unsustainable. The problems with the existing formula for billing townships were raised at the Rural Mayors Forum, as was changing provincial landfill regulations, creating new costs.

With these burdens, treasurer Dave Stewart is still working on the 2016 budget, trying to keep municipal taxes as low as possible. Stewart is also working to reduce the amount of unpaid taxes.

On a happier note, Councillor Nancy Matheson reported a little more than \$8,000 left in the honorarium committee budget; council agreed to donate this for new gym equipment.

Finally, Councillor Gregg Roberts reported on new initiatives to assist autistic children and Alzheimer's seniors who may wander, through the use of locating bracelets.

Submitted by Vivian Bloom, Mayor