

HH council frowns upon draft union library proposal



Southern Ontario Library Service library development consultant Peggy Malcolm presents a draft North Hastings union library proposal to Hastings Highlands council. / SARAH SOBANSKI Staff

By Sarah Sobanski

Some members of Hastings Highlands council have concerns about the area's draft union library proposal.

Southern Ontario Library Service library development consultant Peggy Malcolm attended council to give a delegation on the North Hastings union library board proposal March 21. It would see Bancroft, Wollaston, Carlow-Mayo and Hastings Highlands libraries, and Faraday come together under one library board. She also presented the proposal to the public at a special meeting March 20. Some major changes of the proposal include that each council would dissolve its library board and establish a union board with representatives from each municipality. Current libraries would consolidate administration roles to a single full-time CEO, processing clerk and bookkeeper. Library funds would be shared but municipalities would continue to cover the costs of their library buildings, included any future infrastructure needs.

'We now have to see if councils are interested in the project, and then, if they end up agreeing in principle, then we would have to figure out the contents of the agreement,' said Malcolm. Bancroft's library board chair has said it will ask its council to agree to the proposal in principle and Wollaston's library board has recommended to its council not to move forward with the proposal. 'So the ask is really is there an interest in Hastings Highlands to proceed with this.'

She added, 'There's nothing to lose really.'

The staff proposal for Hastings Highlands Public Library is for 68 staff hours per week (down from 76), including a minimum of two members available to the public at all times. Plus the hours of the full-time administrative positions.

The municipality would be the largest financial contributor to the union library. Combining its provincial and local support it would make up 42.6 per cent of the total union budget.

Councillor Nancy Matheson presented notes from the public made after Malcolm's March 20 presentation.

'I went to see what the citizens thought and I'd like to share this with some of the councillors who were unable to attend,' she said.

'The three strongest points that were made were autonomy, a sense of community' and if it's not broke, don't fix it.'

Matheson said there were 'concerns about Faraday and Bancroft voting together to have a 50 per cent vote if there were four participating communities, concerns about Hastings Highlands making the largest financial contribution and [if] one CEO with 40 hours servicing four of five communities would benefit [the municipality] more than our current CEO working 26 hours just for us.'

She added questions about equal representation, where the CEO would be located and how employees would be impacted.

'Although some positive points were brought forward 'being able to have free membership at all our libraries, policy being written by one CEO, not using time which could be designated by public service and being able to share programming ' the general consensus last night from the people that attended was that the public would prefer to investigate other ways to create more public service hours, to work with our neighbouring communities and to continue to be a forward-moving progressive library without losing our sense of community or our autonomy,' said Matheson.

Councillor Alex Walder provided comments and questions that he had received from the public as well. From them, he suggested

there were ways to collaborate with other libraries while maintaining HHPL's uniqueness and autonomy.

Another comment is there are potentially unanticipated losses that come with this kind of consolidation, he said. Hastings Highlands does not appear to need to take this consuming, risky and contentious step.

He added, We have right now a wonderful organization, new CEO, reconstituted library board, full funding, critics of the past have silenced and become proponents of our library it's working. Possibly the wisest advice that we received from the people to me was let the others try it, see how it works and then we'll have the opportunity to buy-in later.

Councillor Tracy Hagar said many members of the public had told her the Hastings Highlands Public Library had been wonderful over the past month. She said they were impressed with the things that were happening and that they enjoyed seeing the library's new CEO at the library.

Hagar said she didn't see having one CEO for all the libraries as a benefit.

Council discusses draft for fireworks bylaw

Hastings Highlands has tabled the first draft of its fireworks bylaw, just in time for the return of fireworks season.

The new bylaw regulates when, where and what kind of fireworks can be detonated within the municipality. It also restricts the selling of fireworks.

The bylaw will return to council's table at its next meeting for review by the fire chief.

Council releases its remuneration and expenses

Ratepayers paid council \$214,549 for its services last year.

In 2017, the mayor earned the most at nearly \$46,000. The deputy mayor came in second making a little more than \$31,000. Each councillor with council for the entirety of the year made between \$27,000 and \$29,300.

These figures include each council member's honorarium, mileage, professional development and conferences and their statutory employers costs and benefits.