

HH striving to be a leader in waste management

April 23, 2020

By Nate Smelle

During their online meeting on April 15, Hastings Highlands council discussed its strategy to manage the municipality's waste. As chair of the Waste Management Committee Councillor Dorothy Gerrow brought forward a series of recommendations by the committee for council's consideration. The first item on the agenda was a nine-point mandate developed by the committee regarding its goals and intent. Gerrow said the mandate is "extremely important" to the municipality, noting that the committee came up with its recommendations "to protect the council." The mandate declares that the committee's goals are: 1. to be leaders in waste management; 2. to research and implement alternative solutions to waste management; 3. to educate stakeholders on waste and recycling management practices in the province; 4. to develop and implement a waste management plan to address the need to significantly downsize waste sites; 5. to advise and make recommendations to council concerning waste management activities in the Municipality of Hastings Highlands; 6. to gather information on best practices regarding the collection, transportation and disposal of solid waste, organics, recyclables, household hazardous waste and bulky waste; 7. to educate the public on waste management issues (in Hastings Highlands); 8. to determine the status of waste disposal sites; 9. to take other steps that the committee reasonable deems necessary to carry out its mandate. Because points three and seven both dealt with education regarding waste management, Councillor Tony Fitzgerald said they appeared to be redundant. Differentiating between the two, Gerrow explained that the third directive under the mandate was pertaining to educating stakeholders regarding changes coming down from the provincial government; while the seventh point focused on educating the public about waste management in Hastings Highlands. Heeding Fitzgerald's call for clarity, council voted unanimously in favour of the mandate, with a small clerical amendment to point seven to include the words "in Hastings Highlands." Councillor Nancy Matheson presented another motion on behalf of the Waste Management Committee, recommending that an additional Re-Use Day be added to the municipality's list of events. Although the suggested date for the event is Saturday, Aug. 15, she acknowledged that it may need to be postponed until a later date, and possibly even next year due to the uncertainty created by the COVID-19 pandemic. During the committee's discussion regarding the necessity of having an additional Re-Use Day, Gerrow said she raised the importance of when the event is held. Because the second Re-Use Day took place after the Thanksgiving weekend last year when many of the seasonal residents had already left, she said the level of public participation was not as great as the first event held during the summer. Sharing her own observations, Gerrow said "The first day, because it was consistent with the Hazardous Waste Day, it was within an hour that the things I had set out were gone. That's the whole purpose of this." Council approved the motion calling for an additional Re-use Day to tentatively be scheduled for Aug. 15. However, as Matheson suggested it may need to be rescheduled depending on the state of the pandemic at that time. The Waste Management Committee also recommended that council direct staff to conduct an investigation with the municipality's insurer and the Ministry of Environment as to whether they are legally allowed to have an area at its waste sites to store good reusable items "with the exception of scrap metal items that can be sold for scrap prices" for ratepayers to take home for their own personal use when the waste site is open. "This is somewhat of a contentious item because we hear of other areas that do this," said Gerrow. "There's a lot of conflicting information that I think if we have a report from the Ministry of Environment and our insurer it would clarify things for our ratepayers. They raise these issues with us and we say that we are not allowed, and then they say "well, this other municipality does this" I just think we should have something official from these entities to know where we stand with it, so the committee can discuss it further and bring further information back to council." Agreeing that the municipality needs to understand potential liabilities regarding letting people remove things from the landfills, Mayor Vic Bodnar said "This type of activity has been carried out in other locations, and what the waste site attendants find is that people digging through piles of stuff not only is a liability issue, but it creates more of a mess." Also expressing his reservations, Fitzgerald said he is very nervous about the idea of allowing people to remove things from the landfill. "I think there are all kinds of potential problems and liabilities with this," he said. "Attendants have their hands full just trying to get people to put their waste in the correct places and get their recycling done properly. If they have to then be expected to turn around and monitor everything that is going out of the dump as well, it might prove untenable." While Deputy Mayor Tracy Hagar likes the idea of giving a second life to reusable items instead of adding them to the municipality's waste sites, she also thinks more information is needed from the ministry and municipal insurer. Sharing her enthusiasm for the idea, Hagar said "If we can avoid putting things into the landfill and someone else can use them free of charge, I

think it's a wonderful initiative. Operations manager Adrian Tomasini said to make this work they would need to have a separate re-use centre on site where they could safely store reusable items away from the contaminants in the landfill. In addition, he said the one of the attendants on site would need to make the decision as to which items are indeed re-usable before they are placed in the facility. The facility would have to keep the materials away from the environment to prevent the items getting more deteriorated, said Tomasini. I am aware of few places that have them that are approved by the Ministry ? It can be investigated that's for sure, but these items would have to be put in a reuse facility immediately and not into the landfill. Despite their varying positions on the idea, council voted unanimously for staff to conduct an investigation into the matter.