

HH to investigate its infrastructure needs

By Sarah Sobanski

Hastings Highlands is receiving federal funding to assess the state of its infrastructure.

The last week in October saw more than 100 municipalities receive Federation of Canadian Municipalities funding. Hastings Highlands announced it will receive up to \$20,000 from FCM's Municipal Asset Management Program to "conduct a buildings and facilities strategy."

Mayor Vivian Bloom said the strategy will look at the infrastructure needs of structures owned by the municipality from sand domes to fire halls to its community centres.

"We have to look at all of our buildings, it's almost the same as when we had to look at our highways, an asset management plan," said Bloom. "It's looking at all our buildings, the shape they're in, how much it's going to cost to make them all totally accessible."

The province has set deadlines for municipalities to make public buildings accessible in its Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act.

"The deadline is coming where you're not 100 per cent you're either going to get fined or get in trouble with the province," said Bloom. "We've really got to start working, whether we keep them all or we sell off some that aren't - some of them would cost more than what the building is worth to make [them] totally accessible."

Hastings-Lennox and Addington MP Mike Bossio also weighed in on the funding via release.

"Small rural communities often find it very difficult to compete with large communities for existing infrastructure funds," said Bossio. The announcement noted he lobbied for the funding as a part of the Liberal Rural Caucus.

He added, "They often lack the necessary human resources relative to larger communities to successfully brand their need and complete complicated application processes, including asset management plans. Small communities also often lack the financial resources needed to hire outside grant writers, or even to pay for the necessary reports to include with their applications."