

Man to petition OMB

By Sarah Sobanski

Hastings Highlands council has until April 2017 to change its election process, according to a local constituent.

Hastings Highlands resident Jim McPherson was among locals who gathered at council's regular meeting Dec. 7. He was listening for council to have a follow up discussion of its Nov. 23 public information meeting on at-large voting.

McPherson first brought the need for change in Hastings Highlands' electoral system to council May 4. There are over 1,500 more people between Hastings Highlands' Bangor, Wicklow, McClure Ward (3,048) and its Monteagle Ward (795). McPherson suggested this creates an unfair democracy in Hastings Highlands.

A former history teacher, McPherson has studied Canada's democracy. He told *Bancroft This Week* Canadian legislature allows for a review of municipal boundaries and election processes every 10 years.

Section 222 of the municipal act allows a municipality to divide, re-divide or dissolve existing wards. At the Nov. 23 public meeting, clerk and manager of corporate services Robyn Rogers presented this to attendees. She suggested council held the public meeting to be proactive. If a petition was submitted to the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB), council will likely have to fix its election system.

McPherson wants the municipality to fix its election system without getting the OMB involved. He favours a five-member council system where three councillors, the deputy mayor and the mayor are each elected at large. This was one of the proposals made at the Nov. 23 meeting. He plans to submit a petition to the OMB if council does nothing.

"I told them that if they haven't got a bylaw by the end of April," McPherson shrugged later in interview with his petition in-hand. He discussed with council during its question period how much time they needed to act before giving it an informal deadline of April. "Hopefully they will [do something] by then."

According to the at-large meeting, the petition requires the signatures of one per cent of the electors in the municipality or 500 of the electors in the municipality whichever is less. If the one per cent is smaller than 50 electors, 50 electors must have signed the petition at minimum.

Council discussed hosting another public meeting at night for those who couldn't attend the first meeting, but the motion was defeated. It extended the deadline for public comment and opinion forms on at-large voting to Feb. 1. It suggested that after the reports from the public were recorded council might again discuss another public meeting. After the public's comments are filed, they will be discussed by council at its following council meeting.

More information on at-large voting and multi-ward voting can be found at Bancroft This Week's report on the meeting at www.bancroftthisweek.com/?p=7335. Comment forms can be found at the Hastings Highlands' website at www.hastingshighlands.ca/contact-form.php.