

Recycling initiative saves municipality big

By Nate Smelle

The following are series of brief reports from the Wednesday, Feb. 4 meeting of Council in Hastings Highlands.

Council got a pat on the back from operations manager David Robb for successfully implementing the clear bag policy last year to help improve recycling in Hastings Highlands.

By the end of last year the municipality had increased its recycling tonnage to the tune of 589 tons for the year 2014, comparable to 247 tons in 2013, said Robb.

We've seen more than a double increase in the recycling that we are capturing and diverting from our landfills as we recycle.

That is certainly good news for this municipality, and I know that we all took some heat on this recycling issue when it first started up, but the proof is certainly in the pudding here, said Lévecque.

We know reading back some financial benefits and it's also great for the environment. It is really a win-win situation.

This is a huge step forward, and a major success story, added Robb.

This will also translate into a greater amount of dollars coming to municipality from Waste Diversion Ontario to help fund a waste initiatives. I couldn't be more thrilled.

Citing similar success stories in other rural municipalities, Robb said it is very important that Council and staff keep on top of this initiative to ensure its long-term success.

It's hard to put a dollar value going forward on what this will save us in landfill capacity, but it's huge, said Robb.

The landfills and waste are going to be a large part of our expenditures over the years as we go forward here having nine landfills.

Council takes a second look at shoreline protection

Council revisited the idea of improving Shoreline protection bylaws in Hastings Highlands. The meeting began with a video presentation of the documentary film *Ribbon of Life* by Barb Elliot. The film emphasized the importance of protecting the health of shorelines in relation to the overall health of the lake ecosystems in cottage country. Councillor Greg Roberts believes that extending the vegetative buffer zone from 15 metres to 30 metres as suggested in the film, was not be feasible considering the size of many properties on the lakes in Hastings Highlands. Instead he suggested reducing the County's already existing bylaw of 15 metres down to five metres.

Councillor Mike Léveque suggested it was not in the public interest to start stripping away already existing shoreline protection laws.

I'm not in favour of expanding the buffer zone in any way shape or form, said Léveque.

I don't think it's needed. It would also go against the County planning as far as I understand it, which has affixed the buffer zone at 15 metres. Also there are financial ramifications of us having a more restrictive zoning bylaw than our surrounding municipalities. If we are competing here for growth, for us to put in a very restrictive new zoning bylaw on our lakes is going to restrict our growth against our competition.

?In the beginning with the Lake Association the consensus was to start with education, information, negotiation and the introduction of plants through the MNR's stewardship program,? added Councillor Nancy Matheson.

?It was suggested that we develop an education program for the residents, purchasers and the frontline people such as the real estate agents and contractors. We can offer certification programs to contractors and have example properties on the lakes to show people.?

Matheson said she believes the health of septic systems adjacent local lakes are greater concern to the health of the lake ecosystems than creating a larger vegetative buffer. Mayor Vivian Bloom agreed with Matheson that the state of people septic systems in around the area's lakes is an important part of protecting lakes in Hastings Highlands, however, she noted that the previous council?not wanting to upset ratepayers in need of a new septic system?had decided not to act on this issue.

Bloom said she feels the municipality needs to take the health of lakes seriously, stressing the importance of establishing a Shoreline buffer zone bylaw.

?We do have to have a Shoreline buffer zone bylaw as far as I'm concerned, and as long as we get it right it's not going to harm new development,? said Bloom.

?I think the people on the lakes want their lakes protected, and we all want the lakes protected. One way or another we've got to get this right. That is why this is at second reading for discussion. I think it's a good idea to have a site plan approved by our planning department and a permit.?

Disaster Relief Committee looking for support

Centre Hastings Disaster Relief Committee (CHDRC) member, Joe Kaehler presented a request for Council to make a donation of \$500 to support the committee's fundraising campaign. The committee is seeking a dime from each ratepayer residing in Hastings Highlands and other neighbouring municipalities to help with the restoration and compensation for costs accrued by residents living in the flood's path.

?Last year's flood?a one in every 100 year flood?may seem like old news to most, however, the flood's impact to a few of our neighbours feels quite recent and remains a devastating disaster,? said Kaehler.

?Hastings Highlands is no stranger to a devastating flood disaster; you have experienced one in recent times [Spring flood of 2013]. Rural communities are a wonderful experience. It's all about neighbours helping neighbours and that's my message to our surrounding municipalities.?

Council is currently considering the CHDRC's request.