

South Algonquin supports DNSSAB resolution on homelessness



By Michael Riley

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

At their meeting on Nov. 6, South Algonquin Township council voted to support the resolution from the District of Nipissing Social Service Administration Board regarding the Solve the Crisis campaign against homelessness, an escalating crisis in municipalities across Ontario. As a member of the Northern Ontario Service Deliverers Association, DNSSAB voted with resolution 2024-98 at their meeting on Oct. 23 to join in the support of Ontario's Big City Mayors' Solve the Crisis campaign that calls for action from the provincial government to address the escalating homelessness crisis, and that DNSSAB support key actions within this campaign including; the creation of a Ministry and Minister with appropriate powers and funding to address full spectrum of housing needs as well as mental health, addictions and wrap around supports, the creation of a task force by this Minister with broad sector representatives including municipalities, healthcare, first responders, community services, the business community and the tourism industry to develop a Made in Ontario Action Plan, support for municipalities by providing the tools and resources to transition those in encampments to more appropriate supports, when deemed necessary, funding commitments to the appropriate services these individuals need, community by community, where there are gaps in the system, investment in 24 hour, seven day a week community hubs/crisis centres to relieve pressure on emergency centres and first responders. Launched in August 2024, www.SolveTheCrisis.ca is a campaign launched by Ontario's Big City Mayors to address the homelessness, mental health and addictions crisis happening across the province. The OBCM includes mayors of 29 single and lower tier cities with a population of 100,000 or more, who collectively represent nearly 70 per cent of Ontario's population. They advocate for issues and policies important to Ontario's largest cities. After years of advocacy, they are acting to confront the homelessness crisis in municipalities and regions across Ontario. They launched this initiative to get the federal and provincial governments to come to the table to help out with this crisis, as Ontario municipalities of all sizes have stepped up, putting in place programs and housing options along with community partners and other stakeholders, advocating for funding that might be provided from other levels of government but that falls short without assistance from upper levels of government. A homelessness count was conducted last month by DNSSAB called Nipissing Counts. The last count in 2021 found that there were 300 homeless people in the district, a three per cent increase since the 2020 count, although progress was made to help the homeless over that 19-month period, including nearly 100 new shelter, transitional and permanent housing units. Matthew Campbell, media relations person with DNSSAB says that the results from the 2024 count are still being tabulated. The anticipated date for the community release of the count numbers is currently planned to be around Dec. 18, he says. Back when solvethecrisis.ca was launched this past summer, Burlington Mayor Marianne Meed Ward, chair of OBCM, said that there is a humanitarian crisis happening on our streets, people are dying and something needs to be done. The number of people who are unhoused, as well as those suffering with mental health and addictions issues, is growing at an alarming rate and municipalities cannot tackle this crisis alone. We need the province, along with all levels of government and community partners, to implement programs that have proven to be effective. This cannot wait, we must work together to solve this crisis now, she says. As of Nov. 7, more than 2,300 unique letters have been written by those experiencing homelessness and

addictions issues, their families and friends, community partners, municipal leaders, and members of the public. This has also resulted in over 15,000 emails being sent to provincial and federal MPPs, MPs, cabinet ministers and party leaders. More information on the Solve the Crisis initiative can be found at www.solveethecrisis.ca, or contact solveethecrisis@obcm.ca. At their Nov. 6 meeting, Mayor Ethel LaValley explained the Solve the Crisis initiative, saying that in a nutshell, all the big city mayors came together to say they had to do something about homelessness. So, they launched Solve the Crisis campaign, and I think it's important and I think that with DNSSAB endorsing it, we should endorse it as well and do anything we can do to help in this crisis. As Councillor [Joe] Florent said, people are out in the street through no fault of their own. I think we're dealing not only with [mental illness] but other situations like not being able to pay rent, afford food, so where do they go? So, I would just ask this township to endorse this also and do what we can in terms of the homelessness issue, she says. Council subsequently voted to support the resolution from DNSSAB regarding the Solve the Crisis campaign against homelessness.