

Status quo continues for South of 60

By Sarah Vance

More than 250 people were in attendance for a special meeting of council at the Paul J. Yakabuski Community Centre, on Wednesday, May 18, where the primary order of business was the fate of the South of 60 Arts Centre.

The meeting came after a winter of scrutiny into the activities of the popular visitor's centre, which currently curates 12 installations and facilitates more than 10 festivals annually under the direction of Anya Gansterer and Danielle Paul.

‘Essentially council has been reviewing the use of this facility and its role in the community,’ said CAO Craig Kelly. ‘This culminated in one special meeting that was almost eight hours in duration, wherein we have been seeking to strengthen relationships.’

After much discussion and questions from the floor, a motion was put forward by Councillor Maika, seconded by Councillor Archer.

The motion proposed that the South of 60 Centre operate for nine months of the year, and close during the off-season, with employees continuing their work at a different site for the remaining three months. This motion was defeated in a recorded vote.

A second motion was advanced by Councillor Carl Bromwich, who recommended that the status quo be maintained, while the municipality sought ways to make the gallery more cost-effective.

After much discussion, and applause from those in attendance, Bromwich's motion was unanimously passed through council with first and second readings occurring, in front of the public on Wednesday night.

A third reading will come in the future weeks, when the motion will become a municipal bylaw.

In an interview, Kelly tried to put the discussion in perspective ‘Our Madawaska Valley is known for trail systems, snowmobiling and winter hockey tournaments. But arts and culture is another component of our appeal. Essentially, you cannot have one without the other.’

‘It comes down to our strategic cultural plan and the economic plan for our county, which tell us to invest in the arts and to adhere to the principles of cultural tourism,’ said Kelly. ‘There are more than 62 goals in this area and we are making significant progress towards implementing 42 of them presently.’

‘As we reviewed this facility, and considered the provincial indicators about what is being generated through arts investment, we have been able to demonstrate that a closure of the facility would literally represent a savings of only a few pennies on the dollar for ratepayers.’

‘Arts and culture tourism has become one of our main industries and is attracting many people and businesses which we would not otherwise enjoy,’ added Bromwich in an interview.