

Township gets \$1.4 million

By Jim Eadie

Wollaston Township council made a big decision at their March 22 regular meeting; it related to the road repair known as 'The Ridge to Bridge' project.

New provincial funding has just been approved from the Ontario Community Infrastructure fund, to the tune of almost \$1.4 million (including GST).

This project is for the rehabilitation of The Ridge Road from Highway 620 to the North Steenburg Road, and North Steenburg Lake Rd. from there to beyond Henderson Road. It also includes the rehabilitation of the Nicholson bridge.

In question was whether to repair the old single lane bridge, or to replace it with a brand new two-lane bridge. Repair costs were predicted at between \$185,000 and \$285,000, depending on how extensive the repair done; the estimated cost of a new bridge was \$740,000. The township has the funding to complete a new bridge, but would rehabilitate less roadway to come in at the funded amount.

Greenview Environmental Management also noted in their report to council that upgrading the old bridge to two lanes would cost almost as much as putting in a brand new bridge.

'If the bridge repair costs less than \$200,000, then there will be enough to do all of the roadwork,' said Jennifer Cohen, township clerk.

'The repair work cost is almost 25 per cent of the way there for a new bridge,' said Councillor Michael Fuerth. 'If we do it now, then this discussion will not take place until the next century. Or we can just keep kicking the can down the road.'

'We have two engineering reports that say minimum bridge repairs can be completed for less than \$200,000, but there could still be surprises,' said Cohen.

'The bridge needs to be replaced - either now, or in 25 years,' said Councillor Bob Ireland.

'We have the funds, it will just take away from the resurfacing part,' said Fuerth. 'It would be easier to do the road resurfacing portion of this project in sections.'

Road superintendent Kirk McCaw noted there would be a two to three month road closure to consider.

In addition, the project may not take place for another year, due to environmental impact studies required for such construction.

Cohen will communicate to the provincial funding body the proposed changes in the project and its timing.

In a unanimous vote, council passed a resolution to replace the Nicholson bridge with a new two lane bridge, and deal with road resurfacing as they can, treating the poorest portion of roads first.

More bad news was received on the economic development portfolio.

Wollaston Township council had learned at their March 8 meeting that their application for federal funding to support a proposed Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) project has been denied.

Now the other half of their hopes has collapsed with a sudden and unexpected announcement this past week by the province: it has suspended the Rural Economic Development (RED) fund that the council hoped would fund the other half of their proposal.

Council has decided to continue looking, especially to the new re-worked categories in Trillium funding, as well as the new 'jobs and prosperity' funds coming available. 'It doesn't mean this is the end,' said Fuerth. 'There is a light at the end of the tunnel. We need to continue. We might just have to hire someone ourselves, and carry on. What we could set aside can be part of our budget discussions.'

Bank Robbers Lane, a short section of roadway in the south portion of the township of Wollaston, has also made its way back onto council's radar.

To reflect a historical event, a previous council had changed the name of the road. In the summer of 1961, police chased a car full of bank robbers from Havelock after a \$230,000 heist. The car was eventually abandoned after hitting a rock near the present location of Bank Robbers Lane. Five men ran off into the bushes, but over the next three days, following a manhunt by police and local citizens, they were all eventually arrested. The money was never recovered, and according to local legend, may still be hidden somewhere south of Coe Hill. A book has been written about the case: 'The Bad Luck Bank Robbers.'

In 2012 council debated changing the name of the road, due to chronic thefts of the road signs by collectors.

Council was told at the time that the replacement cost to that date was nearly \$1,000 (the signs are required by law for direction to emergency services). In a split decision, the council decided to keep the name, but also to pursue other means of theft prevention, possibly including a video camera.

Four years later, much has changed - but the signs keep disappearing.

?We have put in posts with a jack-hammer, we have welded posts to old grader blades and other pieces of steel and buried them. But somehow, they even pulled that out of the ground and took the whole thing,? said McCaw. ?We have welded the bolts on, and used more grader blades. I even greased the pole, and that seemed to work the longest. But the sign is gone again.?

The municipality is required to replace missing signs by signs approved for use. Each sign costs \$50, but the biggest cost is the crew replacing the signs. McCaw suggested keeping several extra signs on hand so that the amount of time the road does not have a sign is reduced.

?It is not just us,? said McCaw. ?When I worked for the MTO, certain signs went missing all of the time.?

?The bank robbery has made our township famous,? said Fuerth. ?I would like to keep it.?

Council voted unanimously to continue to replace the Bank Robbers Lane road sign as required.