

Wollaston discusses future of fire department; library board has inaugural meeting

By Jim Eadie

Wollaston Township council has appointed Jason Post as interim fire chief.

Post agreed to the temporary appointment in Wollaston alongside his current duties in Limerick. Post is also the Limerick Township fire chief.

The Wollaston fire chief position was left vacant after Rick Middleton resigned the position, along side his deputy chief and four senior firefighters.

On Jan. 3, council had a special meeting to address how to move forward with rebuilding the fire department.

Dan Koroscil has been hired as a consultant. He made a presentation to council followed by questions. He noted that traditionally fire services have been thought of as firefighting activities, and fire suppression.

“There are more benefits in safety standards enforcement and public education, a bigger bang for the dollar spent,” he said. “In envisioning a fire service, there must be more focus on those two [and] a change of mindset.”

In those circumstances, some members of the fire service wouldn't be trained to fight fires, but deliver safety standards and public education.

“It is not financially viable to have a similar service to a large urban department. You have to scale it down to a size that is workable. You chose to establish a fire department in 1983, and that bylaw needs to be updated to specify what you want your fire department to do,” said Koroscil.

Currently the fire service in Wollaston is trained to conduct exterior fire suppression, with no personnel entering into burning buildings. The service also provides emergency medical response and members are trained in first aid and CPR. That level of commitment by itself would require the current commitment of the fire service of two training days per month, and any additional expectations would require further training costs, and time of volunteers.

“That means you need to talk to your fire department personnel. They are volunteers,” said Koroscil. “What are they willing to commit to doing? More training, and more time? You need to have that discussion. You work towards what is realistic for your community up against what your volunteers are willing to commit to. Then you must create a bylaw to establish your expectations, and make sure the public is well aware what they are. They should be well aware that your fire service is not trained or expected to do rescue work, for example.”

“There is a huge disconnect about expectations, and may be the root of some of the discordance,” said Councillor Bob Ireland.

“They are thinking way up here, and we can only provide way down here.”

Koroscil likened building a fire service to building a house. Each stage of construction is built upon the others. This includes looking at the Fire Protection and Prevention Act, preparing bylaws, policy and procedure, operational guidelines, training and documentation.

“You can't take out any of these elements, as the house will not stand,” he said. “The municipal council and the fire service together will choose what kind of house you build. You might build a \$1 million mansion on the lake, or just an outhouse. It is up to you.”

Koroscil agreed to create a plan of action which will return to council. In addition, he met in the fire hall that evening with remaining fire service personnel and members of council to begin a process of communication.

Brand new library in Coe Hill

The new Wollaston Public Library is up and running with the inaugural meeting of a new board of trustees at the library on Jan. 2. Wollaston council has decided to keep the library open if possible after Limerick Township pulled out of the union as of the end of 2016. The new board is made up of Susan McGee, Peter Lennox, Colin Slade, Gail Dugas and Linda Patterson.

Following a discussion, Slade was acclaimed as chairperson, and Lennox acclaimed as vice chairperson.

“Communication to the librarian will be through the chair. She or he cannot have five bosses,” said Slade. “I am also glad we have a vice chair. We need one as there is so much for us to do right now.”

“We are all going to be required to be leaders this year,” said Lennox.

With that, the board set about administrative policy building which included human resources, appointments, signing authorities, circulation and Internet policies and meeting schedules.

The librarian from the outgoing library, Bonnie Purdy, was appointed interim librarian which expires at the end of March, when she will be given the opportunity to apply for the position.

A new membership system will be established by the board, however Limerick residents who were members of the former library will have their memberships extended until Feb. 10 by which time the board will move forward with new memberships.

The board will also establish communication with the municipal council to discuss the interim library levy. Slade wished to thank Purdy and Wollaston Township clerk Jennifer Cohen for the excellent package of materials and resources prepared for them well in advance, which contributed to an effective and informed meeting.