

Wollaston fire services report tabled at council

By Jim Eadie

The Wollaston Township Fire Services Administrative Review report was tabled by consultant Danny L. Koroscil at council the Feb. 14.

Koroscil is retired after 40 years in the fire service, including 25 years as a services advisor with the Ontario Office of the Fire Marshal. The 25-page report evaluates the current status of the administration and operations of the fire department, looks at internal problems within the department, and offers recommendations. The report notes that there are areas needing improvement, or are adequate, however a number of areas require urgent attention.

There are little or no fire department policies, procedures, or operational guidelines in place by which the members of the fire department can find guidance or work with. The fire department is operating without written process and as a result conflict and chaos has ensued in many areas of operation. Different rules for different people were a major concern and complaint throughout the firefighter membership interviews. There is a lack of clearly defined authority and responsibility, records and reports are not well documented, and there is little standardization and a lack of teamwork, said Koroscil in the report.

The fire service is currently governed by a 1973 bylaw that is very outdated. That is a very old bylaw, he said. It is supposed to govern the fire department operation, and give the chief and officers the power to move forward.

Establishment of a definition of core services, records management, policy and procedure and operational guidelines, with the eventual development of a master plan is required according to the report.

The report also looked at staffing levels, state of vehicles and equipment as well as the fire hall, training procedures and documentation. Koroscil hinted that more money will be needed from the municipality to address the fire hall deficiencies, training and apparatus.

I also recognize that you have a small budget, and we cannot do it all tomorrow, he said. The human resources policy needs to be in place right away before hiring and recruiting new firefighters. Performance evaluations provide a process for feedback, and creating opportunities for improvement. The firefighter knows the standards and expectations, and it clears the muddy waters.

Township clerk Jennifer Cohen in consultation with Koroscil will begin preparing a new bylaw package for the Feb. 28 regular council meeting, as well as a framework for training.

Let it be an efficient, effective and professional fire service, he said. Professionalism is an attitude, it is not a pay cheque. A well run, well oiled machine is attractive the professionalism factor goes up and recruiting becomes easier.

Koroscil later told Bancroft This Week that volunteerism is in crisis across Ontario. There is more pressure on young families, and that is our target group for recruiting, he said. In the past people often stayed for 25 years as a volunteer, but now both parents are working and volunteers now generally stay only five to seven years they just can't manage the commitment. This [Wollaston Township] report is serious, and there's lots that needs to be done. But we can take steps to turn it around, and council is committed to doing that. It is not a disaster. In my experience, there are a fair number of small town municipal fire departments that are struggling to get by.

Koroscil noted that he will continue to see the administrative part of the rebuilding goes forward, and Wollaston acting fire chief Jason Post will ensure training continues for the time being until staffing is addressed. Post is the current fire chief for the Township of Limerick.