

Wollaston gets response from Hydro One

By Jim Eadie

It didn't take Hydro One long in responding to Wollaston Township's letter requesting that they not spray Garlon RTU, or a similar herbicide, within the township boundaries, including township road allowances and township property, for the maintenance of hydro line corridors.

A resolution was unanimously approved by council at their Jan. 20 meeting following a presentation by Citizens for a Better Wollaston, a recently formed community advocacy group. Hydro One is currently planning brush control on a 21 kilometre stretch of three phase line in Wollaston between the hamlet of Coe Hill and the North Kawartha boundary.

Hydro One representatives Terry Forrest and Brian Hill made a presentation to council at the Feb. 28 regular meeting in an attempt to convince council and a large group of interested citizens present, that using a spray applied to stumps and small brush is a safe and appropriate method of choice for their brush control under hydro lines.

"We use spray only on the approval of the customer," said Hill. "We are responsible for 110,000 kilometres of [hydro] right-away for electricity reliability, power quality, outage duration, safety and costs. Manual and mechanical cutting followed by stump and foliar herbicide application is very cost efficient for us. I have a good comfort level that I can use this product safely."

Council learned from Councillor Michael Fuerth that a bylaw prohibiting the spraying in Wollaston would not be appropriate, as controlling the use of herbicides and pesticides to maintain public works infrastructure such as hydro corridors is the responsibility of the Ontario government (Ontario Regulation 63-09 as updated Aug. 2016).

The current letter to Hydro One from Wollaston council appropriately removes permission for spraying from Wollaston Township owned lands and road allowances, but does not extend to private properties within the township.

In a related matter, Reeve Graham Blair told council that the plans underway by the County of Hastings to arrange a weed spraying program have been shelved. This was originally intended to deal with wild parsnip infestations in Hastings County.

Council then moved on to the matter of reviewing and updating its strategic plan.

"This is something that we need to do," said Blair.

"There are some good ideas in that plan, but a shortage of timelines and responsibilities," said Fuerth. "That means that things don't get done. If nobody's feet are held to the fire things won't happen."

"Let's not dilute from a plan, to a list of things to do," said Councillor Bob Ireland.

"Do we need a consultant?" asked Blair. "I don't know much about developing strategic plans."

"The recreation committee has events they wish to plan, and it needs to be put in there with timelines and responsibilities," said Fuerth. "We don't need a consultant for that. This is our plan, and we are the ones to make it happen."

Wendy Mortimer, a local resident who was in attendance, told the meeting that she would be pleased to volunteer and assist council organizing their strategic plan. Mortimer noted that she has some experience working within the provincial government facilitating development of strategic plans.

"It would be very useful to have a facilitator," said Jennifer Cohen, municipal clerk. "To keep the conversation on track."

Council will discuss the idea further at their next regular meeting. The date of the next meeting has been changed to Wednesday, March 15.