

Wollaston has new private road grant policy

By Jim Eadie

After months of development, discussion, fine-tuning, and a committee made up of council representatives and a ratepayer, Wollaston Township council has approved the new Private Roads Grant program policy at the May 12 regular council meeting. By the time the next regular meeting rolled around on May 26, clerk Jennifer Cohen was reporting a lot of interest.

"We have five roads so far have already expressed an interest in participating," she said. "This is being very well received, and people are excited about it." Rather than providing interested residents with a copy of the by-law, the clerk agreed to prepare a simple one-page handout with the required information in an easy to understand format.

The idea behind the program originated when Reeve Graham Blair attended the Ontario Rural Municipal Association convention in February, and learned of a novel approach by another small rural western Ontario municipality to support their taxpayers living on private maintained roads in their jurisdiction. The conversation arose during a discussion about the new provincial planning policy directive for official plans that will potentially prevent new development on private roads. Over half of Wollaston Township's property tax revenue comes from homes on private roads, as it the case in many other small rural municipalities.

The new Wollaston policy, which is described presently as a pilot project, is intended to assist residents living on private roads to upgrade their road, but does not provide funding for maintenance such as snowplowing. People owning residences on a private road are required to create a "road maintenance group" of at least 2/3 of the residents that use the road and share the cost of maintaining the road. The maintenance representative would attend at the township office and submit an application to the treasurer, and once the summer maintenance is completed would submit paid invoices to the treasurer. Reimbursement would be made to the group up to the eligible amount calculated for that road. To calculate the eligible grant amount for 2015, add \$250 per kilometre of roadway, and \$40 for each property owner.

"This is an act of goodwill to these areas of the township who pay the highest part of the taxes, but have to supply their own road," Blair told the May 12 meeting. "The experience where municipalities are doing this already is " they have noticed over time good improvements to the roads."

Council will review this pilot project after the first year. Applications must be submitted by September 30. Further information can be obtained by calling the Wollaston Township office at 613-337-5731.