

Wollaston passes 2016-17 budget

By Jim Eadie

Wollaston Township council has passed their 2016-17 budget with a net tax rate decrease of just under a half a per cent. Both the school levy and the Crowe Valley Conservation levy are down slightly for this year.

'This was reached despite an increase of over 30 per cent in our OPP bill,' said Councillor Michael Fuerth. 'Some other municipalities are getting really whacked.' Said municipal clerk Jennifer Cohen: 'It now costs us \$260,000 a year to police 711 people. That is a lot of money.' Added Fuerth: 'And it will go up for the next three years.'

Municipal clerk Verna Brundage reminded council that with a near zero per cent tax rate, an individual's actual tax bill will depend on any assessment changes to their property for this year.

Council also agreed to enter into an agreement with Bancroft Community Transit (BCT) for a twice monthly 'community transit' van to carry residents to and from Bancroft, where they could connect with that town's TROUT bus. This service will cost the municipality \$75 per day twice a month, and will be reduced by the fare of \$5 paid by each rider. The exact days for service, and times of departure, will be discussed with BCT, who are willing to try out the service at first to see how it works out. Council further agreed to make a donation of \$1000 to support the TROUT.

Following a discussion with road superintendent Kirk McCaw, council has approved issuing a call for tenders on the Nicholson Bridge replacement. There are two options of replacement: a standard pre-cast concrete bridge, or a culvert-style bridge like what has been installed at McDonalds Restaurant in Madoc This could be constructed from galvanized steel, aluminum dip, or full polymer.

'Cost is one thing, but longevity is important,' said McCaw. 'Which way would I go? Probably concrete' in our experience it has long life expectancy. If we were using salt there, and we don't, they estimate 50 years before any maintenance. The bridge we are replacing is 100 years old, and is still in pretty good shape for its age.'

'As an investment, we don't want to look at this again for a long time,' said Fuerth. 'We cannot make a decision on this based just on the price.' In the end, council agreed to tender for both styles of construction of the new bridge.

Fire Chief Rick Middleton presented his quarterly report to council, and began his presentation by reviewing their response to the recent house fires on Norman Lane in Coe Hill. Middleton noted that he is available 24 hours at the telephone number listed on the municipal web site if people need information or 'want the facts.' Several spectators in the gallery were allowed to ask questions during the presentation.

In his report, Middleton recommended that the municipality look in future at recovering some of the firefighting costs from the insurance companies involved. 'At present, these costs are eaten by the municipality,' he said.

Councillors expressed their appreciation for the department's work. 'Thank you for your support,' he summed up. 'I appreciate the questions. We strive to be an open book.'

On a different note, council voted unanimously to retain the services of Chris Drost to prepare the Trillium grant application for the municipality's Asset Based Community Development project. Drost had originally been hired to complete a Rural Economic Development grant, but the program was unexpectedly cancelled before the application had been submitted. The municipality will be asking Trillium for about \$100,000 for a three-year time frame, and will be expected to contribute \$5,000 per year of each of the three years. If approved, a coordinator would be hired for that period, and that position would be publicly advertised