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HH approves 2020 capital budget

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By Nate Smelle

With the early approval and release of Hastings Highlands capital budget for 2020 by council, the municipality is poised for a busy year ahead. Mayor Vic Bodnar said that being able to get the capital budget done early will be very helpful because it will allow council to begin working out the ?nitty-gritty? of the work that needs to be done throughout the municipality in the operating budget. Despite the fact the budget came in at $6,198,058 ? nearly $4-million more than the municipality's 2019 capital budget ? Bodnar said ratepayers need not be concerned about inflated taxes in the new year.

?In conjunction with the government money that we are getting we have money in the budget set aside as well, so we are going to be doing more than what we first anticipated,? Bodnar said.

?It's a necessary thing since it has to be done anyways. This just makes it easier by doing it all at once rather than piecemeal ? the bottom line with everything is that we don't see a tax increase.?

Bodnar explained that the reason for the increase in comparison to last year's budget is mainly because of a few ?long overdue? infrastructure projects planned for 2020. The most expensive of these expenditures is the revitalization of downtown Maynooth, which will cost approximately $1.75-million. Roadwork needed on Hwy 62 that amounts to just over $1.4-million is also a major contributing factor in the capital budget.

Because many of the roads in Hastings Highlands that were constructed long ago were built incorrectly without a proper base, Bodnar said it makes their reconstruction more difficult and costly. While the majority of the funds allocated for roads will be used in the revitalization of downtown Maynooth and the reconstruction of Hwy 62, he said there is also a considerable amount of work that needs to be done on local bridges and culverts that were damaged during the third 100-year flood since 2013 which took place this past spring. Having applied for funding from the province to help cover the costs of the 20+ culverts and bridges in need of replacement or repair, Bodnar said council is hopeful that they will receive additional funding through the grants they have applied for.

Another significant item dealt with in the 2020 capital budget are the costs associated with the municipality's fire departments and other facilities. Noting how there has been a ?strong increase? in the number of firefighters, Bodnar said the municipality will need to purchase more bunkersuits as well as make upgrades to other outdated equipment.

?A lot of the equipment we have is completely outdated,? said Bodnar.

?There is one truck that is around 24-years-old, which is obviously not a functioning vehicle, so we need to upgrade that. The other issue are the facilities themselves. In our facilities plan, not only for fire departments but operations yards, and community centres, etc., there are some critical things that needs to be addressed. Some of the fire department's structures are on that list of other issues that we need to deal with.?

Describing the capital budget as ?well-informed,? treasurer/deputy CAO David Stewart said ?It is addressing council's strategic plan and vision for the municipality,? and ?priority projects? such as Hastings Highlands Road 62 which are included in the municipality's asset management plan. Recognizing that improving the Hastings Highlands' fire services as one of the main focuses of the budget, he said the municipality has set aside $500,000 for the ?modernization? of Fire Station 4.