

South Algonquin debates modifying its Strategic Plan

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By Mike Riley

South Algonquin Township council discussed its strategic plan during their council meeting on Nov. 4. Their current plan was drafted in 2016, and the items to be focused on over the next year will be the implementation of a broadband and asset management program, updating the township website, implementing a modernization study and branding plan and a community safety and well-being plan. While the plan was initially set to be updated in 2021, that update could be deferred until 2022 or 2023, when a new council is voted in, in South Algonquin Township.

Holly Hayes, the clerk and treasurer for South Algonquin Township, told council that the gist of her report was that when the strategic plan was written in 2016, the intention was that it would go from 2016 to 2021.

?That would make it renew in 2022 and as I've written in the report, I'm not sure that's good timing, as there's the potential that council could be lame duck or does it make sense for council to start an updated strategic plan in the last year of their term?? she says.

Hayes asked if there were any comments on her report. Councillor Bongo Bongo had a question about the broadband plan that staff had been working on putting together.

?Up until this term is done, how are we doing for time? When I look at your summary of the 2020 Strategic Plan update there are a few things that have not been done, although other things have been done. How many more things from the list can we fit in to this year?? he asked.

Hayes replied that that was partially why she put the plan update into the council's package.

?When it was done in 2016, there were some high-level ambitions and goals. Some of these things have changed, requirements have changed, or council has done research and determined that it is a path they don't want to follow. My intention was to highlight how staff is feeling going into 2021 with the pressures of COVID-19. I did spell out the priorities in the staff report, what we should be working on for 2021. I'm looking for council to tell me how to proceed,? she says.

Mayor Jane Dumas said that it was already established that broadband was a priority in the 2021 budget and that money for it would be available.

?The annual general meeting of Rural Ontario Municipal Association is going to be happening in January. A lot of issues are going to be covered in that virtual conference that ties into what we want to do in the current plan, and broadband is one of them,? Dumas said.

Dumas encouraged staff to look at that and let them know if they want to attend the virtual ROMA conference because she feels that it has a lot of things that will help council tie the last two years of its term together with regard to its priority items.

Hayes asked council if they wished to embark on a new strategic plan in 2021, or wait until 2022 or 2023.

Councillor Richard Shalla thought it would be an advantage to a new council if they at least started the process.

?It would give them an idea what the plan was and if they wanted to change it, they could as it wouldn't be finalized. It may be beneficial for going forward,? he says.

Hayes says that she looked at a number of other strategic plans from other municipalities for inspiration, and she especially liked the plan from Strathroy-Caradoc Township.

?I like the layout. It's short, to the point, outlines the things that a strategic plan needs in a succinct way; vision, mission, values, goals, strategies and tactics. It then applies those things specifically to infrastructure, economic development, community well-being, customer service, growth management and destination building. I think this type of plan could be very helpful for our staff, council and the public in South Algonquin,? she says.

Hayes also feels that the plan is well structured and balanced enough it could be longer term, giving the township more direction and more opportunity to achieve its goals. While their current strategic plan is for five years, Hayes feels they could extend it to a nine-year plan, like the plan from Strathroy-Caradoc, which would make it cover multiple terms of council.

?So, if we move forward with the strategic plan, I would hope our new plan would mirror something similar to what Strathroy has. I think we could do it in such a way we could put it up at the beginning of each new council term and modify it as desired or required,? she says.

Dumas agreed with Hayes, and said that having the ability to do that was what would make it a viable living document.

?Based upon the conversation, we'll bring it back to a committee and have some further dialogue. You've given us some food for thought into the process and the possibility of the longevity of the plan being critical as well,? she says.

Acknowledging Dumas' comment, Hayes asked Carla Gatley, the deputy clerk and treasurer, to table a resolution to that effect.