

Board of health to increase 2022 municipal levy



By Kristena Schutt-Moore

During the financial committee's reports to the Hastings Prince Edward Board of Health meeting on Wednesday, Sept. 1 the municipal levy and the possibility of it increasing was discussed.

It was announced that this year the public health unit was dealing with a \$700,000 deficit, of that \$350,000 was for health and COVID-19 related costs and schools within the unit, and funding will be given from higher levels of government for the school health related costs. However, the battle against COVID-19 has been difficult financially so during the finance committee's 2022 budget discussion on Aug. 25, the topic of having to increase the municipal levy was discussed.

Finance committee member Terry Cassidy brought this forward to the board saying that the increase could be as high as a 1.5 per cent increase which would be a rough average of \$60,000 per municipality. They are also planning to relocate roughly \$300,000 from their reserves, but Cassidy says that he hopes that they don't have to use either option. He also commented that the budget increases for 2022 were being brought up now to give municipalities an early notice so that they can start planning as 2022 will be a critical and difficult year to budget.

The motion for staff to put together a 2022 budget with the assumption of an increase of up to 1.5 per cent from municipalities and an allocation of up to \$300,000 to be drawn from the municipal reserves to balance the budget was passed by the board of health.

Oglaza leaves HPEPH

Dr. Piotr Oglaza is leaving Hastings Prince Edward Public Health to become the medical officer of health and CEO for the Kingston, Frontenac, Lennox and Addington Public Health. Dr. Ethan Toumishey will be taking the position of acting medical officer of health and CEO for Hastings Prince Edward Public Health until the position can be filled. Dr. Oglaza said in the meeting

that he felt that he was leaving the health unit in good hands with Dr. Toumishey.

Dr. Oglaza came to HPEPH from a family practice in 2016 to complete his public health and preventative medicine residency. He was then hired in June 2018 as the medical officer of health and CEO of HPEPH.

Since then he has worked to keep area residents healthy by guiding and implementing services including low income dental programs for seniors, community based sexual health clinics, needle exchange programs and community naloxone distributions, school immunizations and screening programs, as well as improved access to prenatal programs and initiatives to minimize health inequities among the vulnerable individuals in the community.

Dr. Oglaza's leadership has been critical in Hastings Prince Edward Public Health's response to the emergence of COVID-19, said board chair Jo-Ann Albert. His steady, compassionate and decisive leadership has ensured that our region was and continues to be one of the safest places to be throughout the pandemic. While it is difficult to see him leave, we look forward to continuing the close working relationship Hastings Prince Edward Public Health has established with KFLA Public Health, and continuing to work with Dr. Oglaza in his new role as medical officer of health of Kingston, Frontenac, Lennox and Addington Public Health. Congratulations Dr. Oglaza, and we wish you the very best in your new position.

HPEPH has delta cases

During his final report to the board of health Dr. Oglaza announced that at the time of the meeting there were 34 active cases of COVID-19 remaining after three outbreaks. These outbreaks took place in a retirement home, a childcare center and one workplace location. On top of that all cases being found within HPEPH now are all of the delta variant.

In total for the month of August the health unit had 820 cases. Dr. Toumishey says that this increase of cases only shows just how transmissible the delta variant is and that if vaccinations were not in place the health unit would be seeing substantially more cases. Through their contact tracing analysis it has shown that the cases come from areas of clusters and outbreaks. Of them 28 per cent of confirmed cases have been in those who have been fully or partially vaccinated. Dr. Toumishey says that the analysis shows that those who are vaccinated are less likely to get sick, less likely to have symptoms if sick and less likely to spread the virus, compared to those that are not vaccinated.

The HPEPH information dashboard that shares the number of cases has been recently changed to show the numbers of vaccinated, partially vaccinated or not vaccinated. The dashboard can be found on the health unit website, www.hpepublichealth.ca.

Currently Hastings Prince Edward Counties have 73 per cent of the population fully vaccinated and 83 per cent have received their first vaccine. The health unit is also looking at providing a third dose to those in areas such as long-term care homes to help reduce risks of outbreaks.