

Feds uninterested in helping small communities, says reeve

By Jim Eadie

As part of the Harper governments 2014 Economic Blueprint, the Conservatives announced a New Building Canada Fund in February, that they said would help correct the Canadian infrastructure deficit, and enhance economic growth and jobs. Included in this plan was approximately \$1 billion dedicated to small communities, called the Small Communities Fund. Some initial local municipal joy was soon dampened by a look at the finer details.

At the Wollaston Township regular council meeting on April 8, clerk Jennifer Cohen reminded council that in the fine print, 'small communities' are defined as those with fewer than 100,000 people, which means it includes most of the larger urban populations in Canada.

'The money is only for roads and bridges that carry significant volumes of traffic,' she said. 'There is money for things like airports, sewage systems, municipal water, and we don't have any of those things. There is special funding for northern communities, but we fall in the area between them and larger municipalities.'

'They really have no interest in helping the small communities,' said Reeve Dan McCaw.

'It's amazing the disconnect,' said Deputy Reeve Graham Blair.

'I don't think it is intentional, they are just not aware.'

In relation to funding for roads and bridges, local Conservative MP Daryl Kramp told Quinte Broadcasting on April 2: 'It's based on volume .. such as a roadway that gets 50,000 vehicles a day.' As most, if not all Hastings County municipal roads would never reach that traffic number, Kramp promised: 'I'm pushing the minister for an answer or a qualification, we have to know by the summer.'

The government of Canada website notes that to be eligible for such small community funds, the highways (described in terms of freeways, expressways, collectors and arterials) must be 'part of the national highway system and carry significant volumes of freight or passenger traffic.'

Also eligible for funding is public transit with the goal of 'reducing urban congestion', disaster mitigation projects and innovation projects such as building research and teaching libraries and laboratories.

None of the rest of eligible projects would be of any assistance to most small rural municipalities: waste water management, drinking water, solid waste management, brownfield re-development (contaminated sites), local airports, short line rail and short sea shipping infrastructure. Most local rural municipalities do not provide those services, due to their small size and the rural geographic realities.

That left Wollaston council members shaking their heads.

Cohen reminded council of the recent cancellation of the provincial government Connecting Link program that provided support to municipalities maintaining former provincial highway segments within their municipalities.

'They just keep cutting and pushing things down onto us,' she said.

McCaw has many times told council that one bridge replacement alone on Hwy. 620 could bankrupt the municipality.

He noted that in the recent Eastern Ontario Warden's Caucus report there is a call to the provincial government to: 'establish a permanent, predictable and non-competitive program to address the huge unsustainable infrastructure deficit that has been

identified.?

On a number of occasions in the past year at county council, Hastings County CAO Jim Pine has described the municipal infrastructure deficit as a growing crisis that needs urgent attention by the upper levels of government.