

Wastewater worries in Wollaston

By Jim Eadie

Worries about septic systems from several different angles kick-started the Wollaston Township council meeting on April 22, but the meeting ended on a happy note for a number of community organizations that council has decided to support financially this year.

Township clerk Jennifer Cohen reported to council that the expectations for a septic re-inspection program in the township may be too high, and should be re-assessed. Council has been encouraging their environmental and safety services manager, Dylinna Brock, to conduct on-site re-inspection of septic systems in the municipality.

"When we started re-inspections, it seemed important," said Cohen. "In practice it is not locating failed systems, and therefore not attaining its goal."

In order to detect septic problems successfully, it is necessary to dig up and look into tanks, which may be very costly. "A proper re-inspection must be invasive and would cost up to \$500 each," said Cohen. "That could cost up to \$100,000 per year. It doesn't seem to be the responsible way, besides people should be responsible for the proper operation of their own systems."

Brock has suggested that a strong educational plan be implemented instead. She notes that an improperly maintained or failed septic system is a serious human health and environmental issue.

"We will continue to look into what can work better," said Cohen. "In the meantime, the septic program will not include visual inspections this year."

The municipality is primarily focused on the lakes for the immediate term, and will be communicating with waterfront property owners shortly. Brock is always willing to provide information to residents on managing and checking their septic systems.

Then council turned their attention to trailers and tent camping on vacant lots in the township following complaints in 2013. Council is grappling with the design of a new bylaw to govern tents and trailers, which would include conditions, permits and fees. Some complaints involve large numbers of tents or trailers on vacant properties over the summer, that currently are illegal.

Deputy reeve Graham Blair pointed out that not only is there a loss of tax assessment for the municipality, but there are serious concerns about solid waste (septic) and greywater.

"They get garbage services, fire, police, roads and only pay taxes on vacant land," said Reeve Dan McCaw.

Council hopes to limit the days, and numbers of tents and trailers using a system based on the size of the vacant property and setbacks from neighbour's properties.

One resident spoke about dozens of people in tents on a lot next to his cottage during the summer. "I think they should be able to come and enjoy their property like me," he said. "But at some point it becomes a campground, doesn't it?"

Councillor Maryann Post reiterated the importance of knowing what is happening with sewage and greywater at these locations.

Cohen was directed to take the draft bylaw away, and rework some of the sections.

On a happy note, council directed the following grants be allocated to support community organizations. These are funds that have already been approved in the 2014 budget, but the specific allocation decision is now being made.

Wollaston Heritage Society - \$1,000

Warrior's Day in Coe Hill - \$1,000

Heritage Shop Roof fund - \$1,000

Hospice North Hastings - \$1,000

North Hastings Family Health Team - \$1,000

North Hastings Music Festival - \$50

Art Gallery of Bancroft - \$50

Algonquin Arts Council - \$200

Bancroft Area Stewardship Council - \$500

North Hastings Economic Development Committee - \$500