

Hastings Highlands seeks input in strategic planning process

By Nate Smelle

On March 11 members of council and senior staff from Hastings Highlands met at the Hastings Highlands Centre for a day-long strategic planning session to begin defining its own 'homegrown' path to progress.

As the facilitator of the exercise, Penny Sharman of Sharman Municipal Consulting first had the group work together to define the municipality's strengths and weaknesses, while also taking into consideration potential opportunities and threats that lie ahead.

They also identified the municipality's decreasing and increasing pressures. By the end of the day the team of planners had come up with a prioritized wish list of strategic actions to act as fundamental building blocks for the strategic plan.

After presenting council with the results of the exercise on April 15 Sharman was directed to proceed with writing the Draft Strategic Plan; and to work with a committee on developing the municipality's vision and mission statements.

This committee consists of two members of Council, two senior staff and a member of the public.

Members include: councillors Gregg Roberts and Nancy Matheson, clerk/manager of corporate services, Robyn Rogers, treasurer/tax collector, David Stewart, and Carol Russell, president of the Maynooth and Hastings Highlands Business Association.

The vision statement proposed by the committee reads 'Hastings Highlands will continue to be a vibrant progressive rural community working together to build a prosperous future, while fully realizing its motto Beautiful by Nature.'

The mission statement declares 'Hastings Highlands will foster the development of a community that understands the importance of economic development and the natural landscape while enabling everyone to enjoy a desirable quality of life.'

The municipality will achieve this through embracing and enhancing honest and open communication, prudent infrastructure planning and management and corporate integrity.'

Pointing out that people living in Hastings Highlands are typically more engaged than people living in other municipalities where she has worked, Sharman said the municipality is hoping to tap into some of the public's input and ideas.

'People in Hastings Highlands tend to be quite engaged and interested in what is happening in their community,' said Sharman.

'They have an amazing volunteer base here as well, which I think says a lot about their community spirit.'

In an attempt to gather as much input from the residents of Hastings Highlands as possible before moving forward with the official plan, the municipality has created a questionnaire based on the Draft Strategic Plan.

The questionnaire is designed to give the public an opportunity to have their say in what the future of the municipality could look like.

Getting people who care about their community involved in planning its future makes good sense to Sharman.

'Community input gives stability to the plan once it's adopted,' she said.

'Councils come and go but generally speaking, the community at large remains consistent. The other benefit of public input is that it may reveal some issues or observations that were missed in the strategic planning process up to this point that are important and should be incorporated into the strategic plan.'

The idea behind the questionnaire she said is to provide an outlet for people to share their thoughts, opinions and knowledge regarding important municipal affairs such as infrastructure, economic development, good governance and effective administration, health, recreation, culture and lifestyle and the environment.

The Draft Strategic Plan can be viewed on the municipality's website at www.hastingshighlands.ca.

In hopes of attracting more input from the public Sharman said the municipality is discussing an extension of the questionnaire's deadline from Aug. 28 to the end of September. The questionnaire is also available online at www.hastingshighlands.ca/strategic-planning-questionnaire.php, or in print at the municipal office in Maynooth.