

Disconcerted residents question Hastings Highlands council

By Sarah Vance

While Hastings Highlands chambers were packed with ratepayers seeking answers, curbside garbage collection failed to appear on the agenda, on Wednesday, July 20.

This was disconcerting for residents like Lorraine Fell, who during the 10 minutes allotted to questions, asked why council continues to ignore this issue.

“This is not on the agenda Ms. Fell, so you are not allowed to ask questions about it,” stated Mayor Vivian Bloom, who dismissed the former councillor's questions.

A little under two years ago, Hastings Highlands council ceased curbside garbage collection without public consultation for its more than 4,168 residents.

This cost saving measure has not brought tax decreases and environmental concerns are being raised as household waste is being burned at private residences; and residual waste is gathering along the roads; with an additional burden being placed upon the extended families of elderly and disabled Hastings Highlands residents.

A former mayor, Emond commissioned an independent analysis of waste collection, which significantly undercuts the quotes provided by the municipality, and which uses an in-house model, at a cost of roughly \$5 per week per resident.

“Does Mr. Emond need to submit to council as a delegation in order to be heard?” asked Fell, who stated that she and other residents would be happy to join Emond, who first challenged council at a public budget meeting on May 2.

Despite Fell's questions council declined comment.

Recycling however, was on the agenda, with Beaumen Waste Management Systems Ltd being approved for municipal tender, at a rate of \$861,829 (excluding HST) over five years.

Residents are advised to consult with the municipal website for more information about how recycling collection specifications have changed and what will now qualify for drop-off at the municipality's eight waste sites.

Collins Barrow Kawarthas LLP presented audited 2015 financial statements which despite some gains, nonetheless indicate a \$3 million municipal debt, which is in contrast to a once plentiful reserve boasted by the municipality.

Jurisdictional questions were on the agenda as council debated how councillors should respond to ratepayers from the various wards they represent.

Proportional distribution was also on the table and the extent to which the population in each ward is accurately represented in the electoral process.

Councillor Hal Robinson was quick to dismiss a proposal that would see volunteer firefighters taking on a more active role in medical crisis.

“Our firefighters already do an exemplary job at what they do,” stated Robinson. “We shouldn't put them at risk, or extend their reach, which could make them vulnerable for conditions like PTSD, which are known to impact first-responders.”

The Baptiste Cottage Association expressed support for a new bylaw that limits the size of boat houses on waterfront residential

properties throughout the municipality, to a height of 14.8 feet.

Cathy Trimble presented outcomes along the cultural front which include an initiative to see an regional labyrinth project, where each municipality in North Hastings would present unique qualities using this infrastructure. An application for a Canada 150 community grant is being considered for this project.