

Hastings Highlands approves new voting practices

By Sarah Sobanski

Hastings Highlands council has decided council will be elected at-large in 2018.

Council voted between two options at its March 22 meeting to resolve its voter parity issue. Either drop a councillor in Monteagle Ward or vote at-large. After a lengthy debate, council chose to remain the same size approving at-large voting for each councillor, the deputy mayor and the mayor.

'My way of being a councillor is I try to build up, not tear down. It's so easy for us to say, oh yeah, get rid of one [councillor]. To those people it's not fair,' said Councillor Bert Cannon on council's option to reduce representation in Monteagle Ward. 'If the rest of them get two, they should get two.'

Councillors Tracy Hagar, Hald Robinson, Alex Walder and Cannon voted for at-large voting, as did Mayor Vivian Bloom.

'I hate to see us lose our representation [by] only having one councillor to look into the protection of the roads that we have. We have by far the most kilometres of travelled roads in any of the other four townships. If roads is the biggest expense of your municipal budget I can't see putting the onus on one man to look after that,' said Robinson. He and Walder currently represent Monteagle Ward.

Deputy mayor Gregg Roberts and councillor Nancy Matheson voted against at-large voting and in favor of reducing a councillor in Monteagle Ward in an attempt to keep the ward system in place.

'It definitely was not an easy decision to make to eliminate one councillor from Monteagle,' said Roberts. 'We all, and have been, for the last 17 years looking after the protection of the entire municipality ? whether it's one council member, two council members ? the entire council looks after the entire municipality.'

He added, 'It's the personal aspect... It's always been go to your councillor?they know the issues, they know the person, they know what they're talking about ? we're going to lose that completely. You can have seven people in the west end of Herschel township on council or the south end of Monteagle on the council. They may not have been in the rest of municipality ever in their entire life, not likely, but there's the possibility.'

Roberts explained those who had contacted him on the issue wanted the system left status quo or at least the wards system kept in place.

Matheson was also under the impression the majority wanted to keep the ward system.

'From the survey?in reality there was 99 [votes] and 19 [votes] ? 118 votes [total] ? that were all for keeping the ward system whether it be the wards status quo or the wards with having to take the one person away, ? Matheson explained, adding together votes from a survey of 155 people within the municipality. Thirty-four of the people who sent comments back wanted a form of at-large voting for the next election. Leaving the wards the same was what most voted for but it wasn't an option for council because it didn't resolve the municipality's voter parity issue. That left the two most popular options at moving to at-large voting with a reduction in the number of councillors to three at 24 votes, or taking a councillor from Monteagle at 19 votes.

'I was highly instructed?not to take away from Ward 3. I've always felt since amalgamation that we were one municipality. The [ward] names will always be there whether we are voting by ward or whatever?People can run at-large [already]. I think most people feel that by being able to vote at-large they can vote for who they feel are the best on council not just the best in their own ward?It's six of one, half a dozen of the other,' said Bloom.

Council also approved a bylaw for telephone and Internet voting in 2018.

Capital budget approved

Council approved both its operating and capital budgets. The capital budget was proposed at \$1, 463,138. The majority of municipal capital revenues for 2017 in the budget will be funded 58 per cent by municipal reserves at \$854,689 and 18 per cent by municipal taxation at \$269,500.

Council increases grant transparency

Matheson motioned that municipal grant/donation program applicants be held accountable for their impact on the community.

Council approved that any group or person applying for more than \$500 will appear before council to discuss his or her application and its motives. He or she will also submit a follow-up report showing when and how the money was spent within 90 days.

Council creates committees

Council set two committees in motion. The first was motioned by Walder for staff to 'explore and report back ways, including a 'user pay' system to accommodate waste management for residents with accessibility issues.' The second was motioned by Hagar. She wanted a committee of two members of council and three members of the public who are experienced in grant writing to look

into and apply for upcoming grant opportunities and applications to increase the municipality's non-tax revenues.