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Export date: Thu Mar 28 8:46:05 2024 / +0000 GMT

School board action trouble for thrift shop

By Jim Eadie

Wollaston township council learned during the May 9 regular meeting that the Hastings and Prince Edward District School Board (HPEDSB) will not renew the lease for the ?Little White School House? in Coe Hill, which for many years has been the home of the Coe Hill Community Thrift Shop.

The building is located on the current Coe Hill Public School property. It was used before the newer school was built many years ago. Community Care North Hastings has operated the thrift shop with volunteers, and pays $1 per year, allowing almost all revenue generated to be returned to seniors' programs in the community. The organization recently split into two groups. Officially, CARE North Hastings now runs and operates the shop. Four years ago, a new roof was paid for by the municipality to keep the shop operating. HPEDSB was not maintaining the building any longer.

?This thrift shop has returned $18,000 per year back to this community,? said Jennifer Kauffeldt from CARE. ?More important ? losing this shop will have a very negative effect on Coe Hill. It is part of our poverty reduction strategy, it provides volunteer opportunities and social networks ... and a place to shop.? The current lease expires August 2017.

A letter received by CARE dated April 4 from HPEDSB with a large print logo ?Possibilities Today and Tomorrow? at the top, was pretty clear:

?On March 27, 2017 HPEDSB passed a motion declaring the Little White School House in Coe Hill surplus to the board's needs for educational purposes.?

The letter went on to say the property would be disposed of under Ontario regulations for the disposal of surplus real property.

?We recognize the thrift shop is important to our community,? said Reeve Graham Blair. ?We do not want to lose it.?

Blair also noted that water and sewage services for the building come from the gymnasium next door. In addition, the property would have to be severed. There was speculation the board may have made its decision without that information.

?There will be considerable expense involved,? said Blair. ?It would behoove the township to purchase, or rent to own it with intent to keep the thrift shop there ? or it has been suggested the library might go there. I checked with the county, and there has not been any severance applied for yet.?

Council also discussed the potential for a coming together with the school down the road, including library, thrift shop, and other services.

?We know a couple of years out, something might happen with the school,? said Councillor Bob Ireland. ?That seems a bit out of sync with this.?

Kauffeldt noted she has spoken to HPEDSB chair Lucille Kyle about the situation, and ?she is going to try and do some footwork.?

Ontario regulations stipulate that public-school properties be offered for sale to the municipalities in which they are situated first.