

Belleville refutes long-term care homes increase

By Jim Eadie

Belleville has come in for some sharp criticism from Hastings County council members following its recent decision to refuse the county's request for additional funding to support Belleville's Hastings Manor and Hastings Centennial Manor in Bancroft.

All other county municipalities including Quinte West have supported the 2018 levy for long-term care, above last year's level. All three of the major pressures in preparation of the county's overall 2018 budget pressed firmly on the two long-term care homes operated by the county.

Recent Ontario workplace legislation adds an additional cost in salaries of more than \$277,000 due to paid emergency leave. In addition, funding formulas from the province have resulted in both homes losing funding, presenting a challenge. On top of that are the increasing costs of their aging infrastructure.

Not to pay the increase will result in a lot of staffing cuts, said Bancroft Mayor Paul Jenkins told *Bancroft This Week*. That's an absolute no go. Our standard of care is paramount and our staff is already on overload.

According to Jenkins, three Belleville councillors were part of the development of the long-term care budget and were in support of the increase.

We worked hard and we questioned staff looking for alternatives, said Jenkins. Staff did a great job keeping the increase as low as it was. I was very surprised they could get the increase down to where they did.

He added, We have a long-standing agreement with the City of Belleville. We feel the ball is back in their own court.

Jenkins is the chairperson of the county's joint long-term care committee, as well a member of the county finance committee.

In a press release, the Hastings County finance committee chair minced no words.

I think we need to put this issue into further context, he said. The impact on the increase on the City of Belleville's tax levy this year for operating the Manors is .38 per cent. That's one third of one percent. Surely the city with its economic growth and access to windfall casino revenues can afford to pay their fair share as set out in our agreement.

The responsibility for providing the best possible care to our vulnerable seniors in both Manors is something every member of Hastings County council takes seriously, said county Warden Rodney Cooney in the press release. Running a 24-hour, seven-day-a-week long-term care facility is always challenging but we are proud of the work that our staff do day in and day out to make sure the residents of both Manors are comfortable and well cared for.

Quinte West and Hastings County have approved this increase, but not Belleville, said Jenkins. We could not cut any more costs that's just the way it is. We cannot allow the standard of care in the manors go down.

To be clear, said Cooney, we will be sending Belleville the bill for their portion of the long-term care budgets and we expect payment in full as per the cost sharing agreement.