

HH discusses OMB costs report and OCIF grant denial



Hastings Highlands welcomes new bylaw enforcement officer Dawn Bowers (in blue) at its regular meeting Feb. 21. / SARAH SOBANSKI Staff

By Sarah Sobanski

Hastings Highlands' 2017 Ontario Municipal Board hearing cost ratepayers \$45,000.

Council received a staff report of costs of the hearing at its regular meeting Feb. 21. According to the report the majority of costs were tied up in legal expenses at \$31,000. The municipality also paid another \$11,000 in consultant expenses and \$2,300 in other expenses.

The report noted the total didn't include the cost of staff time, including overtime. It estimated staff worked 150 hours or 20 full working days.

“As I reiterated from the last meeting, once again, it's the right of any person or agency to appeal to the OMB when they have an objection to a bylaw passed by the municipality, but this awareness of what it costs everybody as a group, as ratepayers, is good to have out there,” said Councillor Nancy Matheson.

“All this just goes to show that democratic process has a cost,” said Councillor Alex Walder.

“But [the cost] shouldn't stop anyone from exercising their own freedoms,” followed Mayor Vivian Bloom which Walder agreed. As for where that money will be budgeted, treasurer David Stewart said as an unplanned expense.

“There were savings in other areas that allowed that offset from that total budget, as a whole. There was no planned budget for that in 2017,” said Stewart. “It didn't have a direct impact.”

Municipality denied grant for roads work

Hastings Highlands has learned it will not be receiving \$1.7 million from the province for revitalization of its roads.

Council announced its application for Ontario Community Infrastructure Funding to support its Local Road 62 Revitalization Project was rejected Feb. 15 – the third year in a row. The grant is through the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

“It's unfortunate that this important community project has been unsuccessful at receiving funding. There is a lot of pre-planning and staff time that goes into these comprehensive applications. We are working hard to understand exactly why this project wasn't selected for funding and what we need to do to be included in future funding,” Mayor Vivian Bloom said in council's announcement.

Bancroft This Week followed up with operations manager Adrian Tomasini after council's Feb. 21 meeting. He said the road needs to be addressed as it is a safety concern.

“The road has not been repaired since 1971, about 46 years. The province had last done it at that time,” said Tomasini noting it was downloaded to the municipality in '98 – a \$20 million infrastructure responsibility – in today's costs. He added that a road “normally lasts 28 years” and that the municipality was “well beyond” needing the road to have a complete reconstruction.

The municipality has allotted \$2.6 million to 0.22 kilometres west of Musclow Greenview Road on Local Road 62 in 2019 – year three of the five year capital roads plan it released last year. Another three areas of the road are to be addressed in 2021.

“We had hoped that the OCIF fund would come through” to alleviate some of that cost because it is quite a substantial amount to rebuild. We, as a municipality, cannot probably rebuild the road at a provincial standard.”

Stewart suggested the municipality was planning to meet with ministry leaders to better understand what the municipality could do in the future to improve its selections odds for the grant.

?A project of this nature can costs tens of thousands of dollars just to get the application ready,? he said.