

The changing profile of Hastings Highlands

To the Editor,

Recently Statistics Canada, MPAC and Hastings County have all completed studies on Hastings Highlands.

Unfortunately all these organizations use different definitions so it's tough to compare them. And they are struggling with how to handle folks with two residences... As is typical in vacation areas.

Statistics Canada data is from the 2016 census and it shows that our full time resident population is down about two per cent from 2011. And we are older than the Canadian average, with 29 per cent of us 65 or older compared to the national average of 17 per cent. Nothing very startling here.

Hastings County completed a study as part of their official plan in 2013. Over the past 15 years, the North Hastings Market Area has experienced a modest decline in population, they said. This echoes Statistics Canada data. And they tracked the aging trend back to 1996. They forecast that this trend will continue and they see an additional 15 per cent of the population over 55 by 2036.

They report that in North Hastings housing affordability consumes 35 per cent of income, above the national average. They are cagey about forecasting some areas of population growth but say it will be largely based on the county's attractiveness to the 55 plus age group as a destination for retirement/semi-retirement.

Now let's look at MPAC data for 2016. But wait, you say, MPAC is the property assessment firm that sets the value of my property. What do they know about me? Well quite a bit it seems. Remember that MPAC sets up the initial voters lists for municipalities and also their demographics are used by the OPP in their formula for charging municipalities. So yes, MPAC knows a great deal about you and shares it with other provincial government agencies, whether you like it or not.

Ninety-one per cent of HH folks are public school supporters, just eight per cent for separate schools and the residual are French school supporters.

Now let's look at electoral results as next year we have both a provincial and a municipal election. Once again MPAC is looking for black and white data. You are either a resident (live here) or a non-resident. Why is it so hard to understand folks who live part time in two spots?

We have a forecast of 3,800 eligible voters in Ward 1, 3,200 in Ward 2 and 1,856 in Ward 3 for a total of 8,866 for HH for 2018. We had 7,112 in 2014 so our prospective elector count is up 25 per cent reflecting our growing vacation/retirement attractiveness. And I continue to hear lots of buzz about the impact of the completion of the Hwy 407 to Hwy 115 on our area as a destination.

As I have reported previously we are over the \$1 billion-mark in total property assessment, not so far off our North Kawartha neighbours who are at \$1.6 Billion. And well above our other neighbours.

And to bring this right back to our home turf, the last report of our Chief Building Official, shows growth in 2017 of 12 per cent to just over \$10 million in permit values over the prior year and 28 dwelling units created to mid October compared with 18 the previous year.

We are experiencing accelerating growth in our area as a semi-retirement destination and all of the forecasts suggest it will continue. As a mayor of another local lakes based economy said to me recently. Is your municipality ready for this?

It's a good question for our council to debate as this trend is a key driver of our economy.

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