

A message from Hastings Highlands mayor Vivian Bloom

2015 promises to be a year of movement and innovation in Hastings Highlands. In March, we welcomed our new CAO Pat Pilgrim, who comes to us with many years of sound administrative experience, finishing our quest for a topnotch administrative core to lead the municipality through the ever changing municipal world. We finalized and sent our Bird's Creek Secondary Plan to Hastings County for the planning committee to review, prior to it being included in the new Hastings County official plan. It has taken council many years of work to get the proper planning and zoning designations in the Bird's Creek area to predict lands for new homes, commercial and industrial areas to chart our future needs properly. We also started work on our strategic plan for the municipality, which will tie in and work in concert with our asset management plan completed last year. Our asset management plan is a living document which can change daily, weekly, and track almost every type of activity whether it be for roads, finance, waste sites, etc. Every single municipality in Ontario was tasked with producing one of these, and completion was mandatory if a municipality wishes to access any type of government grants in the future. March also saw the beginning of our RED (Regional Economic Development) Grant, and the hiring of a consultant to take us through this multi-year process. Council will work with the Maynooth and Hastings Highlands Business Association, the Lakes Association Group representing many lakes throughout the Municipality, and the residents to focus on economic development. Working together with all of these people and our RED facilitator, is certain to bring good results in moving ahead. Knowing the needs now and in the future will aid in the growth and financial stability of Hastings Highlands. We can no longer depend on government programs for sustainable funding. Without growth we face rising taxation and loss of the good roads and services we have long enjoyed. Municipalities must find new ways to mitigate the rising costs such as policing, higher construction costs and road maintenance, less money to do more with. Growth and new ways of doing business are crucial.

2014 had its many challenges. The municipal elections occupied a year of staff time, culminating with a new council. It was a time of change and growth, as using a consultant, we had a total reorganization of our administrative staffing. Moving staff around to make the best use of talents, we did hire one additional staff member, David Stewart our new treasurer. Many folks saw different faces in the service area, not new hires, just a part of the reorganization of staff. We also spent some time renovating our offices. Our old headquarters was in desperate need of decluttering and it is now so much easier to find everything that we need. We have invested in some new office furniture and donated our old pieces to charity. Furthermore, we now have a fantastic storage system in place for all of our archived documents. Everything in our archives is now safely stored in airtight plastic boxes. Speaking of which, if you are in need of some really useful boxes compare prices online to make sure that you can get the office equipment you need at the best possible price. We managed to save a small fortune by shopping around for office equipment and would urge anyone else to do the same. One big change, was the loss of our curbside garbage pickup. Despite accelerated advertising, no company came forward to take this on, and council sincerely regrets any hardship this has caused some residents. Bottom line here, is that this was one move made years ago without proper consultation as to whether it could be financially viable in a rural area, and according to our contractor, it is not. Future new initiatives must be well thought out, not just to the current cost or wishes, but whether or not it is something that is a viable plan for the future with costs, growth and a rural landscape. This was a big lesson learned on decision making. It must be well thought out and sustainable!

On the subject of waste, we did move last year to a clear bag policy at our landfill sites. This is one initiative that should have happened years ago, as Waste Diversion Ontario had told us that we were no longer meeting our recycling targets. In a rural area, many people already diverted home waste to composting, etc. In reality though, recycling was not winning with so many cans, bottles and other recyclables going into landfills rather than recycling bins. In just a few months our local recycling has almost doubled, we are meeting mandated levels, and extending life to local landfill sites, important in that future landfill closures will be very costly long term expenditures.

Progress is moving ahead, always getting the work done, keeping ahead, meeting schedules and being able to measure our movement. What we want Hastings Highlands to be is progressive! It is no longer feasible to just progress along, we need to be proactive, look for new and innovative ways to grow our municipality, grow our assessment so that we stay an affordable area with a unique lifestyle opportunity. Our area is positioned for growth. With high-speed Internet now readily available, we need to go after people who wish to work from home and get out of the city! We have so much land and beautiful lakes and nature to enjoy. We need to be able to offer jobs to our youth. We need citizen engagement to make change happen. Council is elected to look after the

government side of your municipality, but it is the people who make Hastings Highlands the best municipality and your voice is important. Participate in local initiatives, shop local and support our merchants and our vibrant farmer's market, take part in the festivities which occur year round in our communities and on the lakes in festivals and so many local events. We have to work together to attract new residents and commercial activity and promote our beautiful municipality as a prime place to locate and enjoy a rural lifestyle while raising a family or opening a home based business or new commercial establishment, a warm welcome awaits!

Submitted by Mayor Vivian Bloom