

Business association wants development head hired



Government relations advisor for the Maynooth and Hastings Highlands Business Association Carol Russell presented council with options should it receive government funding for economic development ? and a back up plan for if it doesn't. / SARAH SOBANSKI Staff

By Sarah Sobanski

Maynooth and Hastings Highlands Business Association stopped by council to discuss 2018 economic development and tourism options. It wants a co-ordinator to spearhead growth for the municipality.

Government relations advisor for the association Carol Russell touched on economic development studies conducted over the past few years and said it's time for action. Studies in the spring of 2016 and '17 included secret shoppers and more than 400 hours of face-to-face sit downs with more than 50 area businesses to see how to best support economic growth.

In her presentation she noted, "The major obstacle for growth is lack of marketing and activities showing Hastings Highlands as a great place to live, work and conduct business."

Russell said because the municipality has had about \$50,000 for economic development in previous years, she's assumed that money will be there in the 2018 budget.

With that money she said, "we need to make sure we hire an implementation co-ordinator? We really need someone who is qualified to do this."

The implementation co-ordinator would develop a plan of engagement, cost the top priorities, start implementation, prepare an economic development strategy by the end of the year and attract more grants for development.

Russell proposed that the municipality put more than \$30,000 towards a Rural Economic Development grant for the co-ordinator and then an additional \$20,000 for implementation of top business retention priorities.

"Usually with these grants you have to put up some money to get more money," she said.

If the RED grant came through, it would contribute around \$9,000 and the Community Futures Development Corporation of North & Central Hastings and South Algonquin would contribute an additional \$10,000. This would mean \$50,000 for the implementation co-ordinator.

The RED grant would then also contribute to a commercial website, workshops/community meetings, marketing materials and mileage for the co-ordinator ? totalling \$33,750.

All together the total of the project with the co-ordinator would cost \$93,750 ? 55 per cent of which is paid by Hastings Highlands. If the grant doesn't come in, implementation of priorities is put off. That \$20,000 drops to \$8,000 and the commercial website is pushed to 2019.

"With just the RED grant and the CFDC grant, we've now taken this \$50,000 and turned it into \$93,750 coming to our municipality ? and that's the way it should work. We don't just take municipal taxes, we pay provincial taxes and federal taxes as well and if we don't go after those grants some other municipality will get them. We'll be stuck here just with \$50,000," said Russell.

LED sign debate sputters to a halt

Council also accepted a report on Hospice North Hastings procedures for monitoring its sister LED sign in Maynooth. According to

background of the report, the electric sign policy suggests the care organization will seek input and comments from the general public? past practice has been for a small binder to be placed in the reception area of Hastings Highlands Municipal Office for public comments.? It says Hospice will forward any concerns it can't address to the municipality.

Mayor Vivian Bloom commented that the Arlington Hotel had purchased blackout drapes for its rooms affected by the sign.