

Council chafes at furthering consultations

By Jim Eadie

Comment form results for Hastings Highlands wards versus at-large voting public information meeting were tabled Feb. 22.

"I have been in touch with a consultant in this field (municipal boundary issues)," said CAO Pat Pilgrim. A consultant would be hired to do a ward boundary study. Any eventual changes are appealable to the Ontario Municipal Board.

Council received a petition in December requesting a bylaw be passed for the municipality to re-divide its wards or have its existing wards dissolved. 135 eligible voters signed the petition.

Council was told that the eventual cost to the municipality to make the changes would be between \$20,000 and \$50,000. Any changes would have to be completed before the end of this year in order to apply to the next municipal election, according to the Municipal Act.

"Where we are at? 2.8 per cent of eligible voters started this," said Deputy Mayor Gregg Roberts. "We need to have a better picture of who wants this \$20,000 to \$50,000 potential cost to the municipality. Why are we looking for additional expenses? We could do this at no cost by leaving it the way it is. We always have represented everyone here, and people can talk to any one of us."

"I am concerned about the financial impact," said Councillor Tracy Hagar. "This will cost the ratepayers a lot of money. Anyone can call me, and I will do everything I can for them."

"I find it disheartening we didn't have an opportunity to resolve this in-house," said Councillor Alex Walder. "We are intelligent people and should be able to settle things. Now our hands are set. People now are forced to take sides."

"The choice has been taken out of it," said Councillor Nancy Matheson. "Staff did a lot of work looking for solutions. We are on a timeline now. We have no choice. It's out of our hands."

Council decided to defer any decisions pending further communication with the consultant.

Following that discussion, council didn't seem to have an appetite for hiring more consultants, this time to measure public opinion related to curbside pick-up. Municipal staff had been asked in October to present options for a "secure poll or survey" for each ward about whether or not to bring the service back. The report tabled by Pilgrim noted the estimated cost of such an independent survey would be \$17,005 plus tax.

"That is a little extravagant for a poll," said Roberts. "I am the one that asked for it. But spending resources. Not on a poll at \$17,000."

There was no further discussion on that matter.

Council then voted to approve the new municipal "Antenna System Siting Protocol" presented on behalf of that committee by Walder.

"We want to be an inviting and encouraging host for broadband infrastructure, while at the same time taking an interest in the protection of. . . and the rights of the public," said Walder.

The protocol is now updated to the most recent Industry Canada standards, and includes some changes in fees, notification requirements, and setback distances.

"We had a good committee," said Matheson. "We tidied up an already excellent protocol." Matheson also noted the valuable contribution of two community members to the committee.

A motion to reconsider the policy and procedures for the sale of shore road and road allowances had been filed by Mayor Vivian Bloom on Feb. 2. Following a contentious discussion by council where she broke a deadlock by voting in favor of a significant increase in the purchase price for these lands.

Bloom's motion was marked "Motion Withdrawn" on the Feb. 22 council agenda. When council opened the meeting for questions from the public, she was asked by a resident the reason for withdrawing the motion. Bloom declined to answer the question.