

Council debates what constitutes a farm animal

By Jim Eadie

Wollaston council grappled with the question of the implications of amending their zoning bylaw, which prohibits livestock or hobby farm use on lots currently zoned as rural residential, and comprising less than 15 acres. The question was raised at a previous meeting by Councillor Dave Naulls who questioned where the line is drawn between what is livestock, and what would be considered as a pet. For example, he noted, pot belly pigs, a pony, or even a few chickens could be considered as pets with an amendment to the current bylaw.

Township clerk Jennifer Cohen advised council that the Municipality of Meaford has made changes to their zoning bylaws to permit such use. The Meaford Accessory Livestock on Rural Residential Lots amendment allows "the keeping of livestock for recreational purposes or personal consumption by the occupants of the dwelling on the same rural residential lot." It also provides guidelines for structures, setbacks and manure handling by referring to existing provincial legislation.

"This is very complicated to change," said Councillor Michael Fuerth. "There is bio-security, and nutrient management. People fear well contamination and smell. Seventy-five per cent of infectious diseases come from farm animals. If you want to get chickens, you need to get buy-in from your neighbours. Applying for a minor variance invites input from neighbours."

Fuerth refers to the process of obtaining a minor variance which requires neighbours be notified by the municipality of the application and given the opportunity to provide their input.

"I have put a call in to Meaford," said Naulls. "I would like to hear back from them to see how they are making out."

Council deferred any action until the next regular meeting.

New community development co-ordinator

Wollaston council seems to be pretty happy with the work being done by their new community development co-ordinator, Shannon O'Keefe.

"I think she is working more than 10 hours per week," noted Cohen, although she only gets paid for 10.

"I would like some direction from council about your priorities, and a job description change," said Cohen. "If you agree to more things than the original, it would have budget implications."

"She is the one that's doing the doing," said Councillor Bob Ireland. "At budget discussion, we should talk about the number of hours. Her work will start when the sun comes out."

"Right now, she is volunteering quite a few hours," said Naulls. "I see her at meetings."

"I think that an additional 10 hours per week would be worthwhile for the municipality," said Reeve Graham Blair. "We should put that figure in the budget."

"We promised when we hired her, to review it in 90 days," noted Fuerth.

Council will consider a new job description at the next regular meeting, including defining priorities.

Voting methods to be updated

In the next few weeks, council will be deciding on the voting methods available for the next municipal election. In the past, voting has been conducted by mail, as well as paper ballots at a polling station on election day. Other methods are available to the municipality including online voting, and telephone voting, as well as electronic voting at the polling station, possibly with the elimination of the traditional methods. Council members and township staff have all the details should anyone be interested in more information and the opportunity to have input.

Recorded meetings

"It sure seems like audio recording makes the meeting a lot more quiet," said Blair, referring to the new audio recording equipment in use by council for the first time.

"It makes a meeting a lot more productive," said Fuerth.

Audio recordings of council meetings can now be downloaded from the township web site: www.wollastontownship.ca.

Wollaston council called a special meeting for April 6 to discuss the Township of Wollaston Mediation and Conflict Resolution Project final report prepared by Fournier Consulting Services.

It's also holding a special budget meeting 6 p.m. April 18 in the Coe Hill Legion hall.