

Council quarrels over sign

By Sarah Sobanski

Hastings Highlands staff is looking into the municipality's agreement with Hospice North Hastings for its LED sign.

The sign caused a stir last month when business owner Ro Munich told council the sign disturbed his guests by shining into the Arlington Hotel throughout the night. The sign is one of two owned by the Caring through Culture organization, its sister sign is in Bancroft. It features advertising and municipal events.

Munich wanted council to shut the sign off between 10 p.m. and 7 a.m. Since his delegation, what council can and can't do with the sign has been up for debate. It doesn't look like there was a formal agreement between council and Hospice for the sign.

?The members and the directors of Hospice have written about the sign issue? The directors of Hospice speak of an agreement,? said Councillor Alex Walder who submitted the motion to have staff research Hospice's agreement with council.

Walder said he's been looking for the agreement but has found no evidence of it.

?Without prejudicing anything this is seeking for information asking our staff to present it properly so that we can make a clear and thoughtful continuation or disposition of this issue.?

Hagar agreed noting it's hard to make any decision with the sign without proper information.

Mayor Vivian Bloom said the municipality hadn't yet found its copy of the agreement in files available to them but that there was a resolution of council to accept the sign when it first came to Maynooth.

?Just for argument's sake, say it's a verbal agreement,? said Deputy-mayor Gregg Roberts. He said he believed the agreement was verbal for free 24-hour advertising to the people of Hastings, ?For all intents and purposes, over the years, [Hospice has] followed it.?

He added, ?The light issue, I stood there and looked at it four different mornings because I'm going through town here [at] four or five o'clock in the morning throughout the week. I put my head down and could not see the light changing when the sign changed.?

Walder and Hagar suggested it wasn't about picking sides, it was about finding the agreement whether it was verbal or physical and what it entailed.

?What is the issue?? asked Roberts, suggesting council was making too much of an issue. ?Whether we have a verbal, written or what agreement, there's no issue besides the sign's working and it's doing what it's supposed to do.?

?It seems like some of us are choosing sides already,? replied Walder. ?You're choosing between [an] incredibly worthy community organization and [an] incredibly worthy, fine individual and businessman. You are judging before the facts.?

The motion passed where each member of council voted in favour except for Roberts, though Bloom and Hagar pointed out their motives were just to find information.