

Council reviewing antenna bylaw

By Sarah Sobanski

Hastings Highlands has created a committee to review its antenna system siting bylaw. After investigating a large investment program by the federal government to install Internet infrastructure in rural communities, Councillor Alex Walder moved that the committee be struck.

“There was a new update for the Industry Canada protocol, [I] was wanting to have our bylaw actually updated from Industry Canada. It was all generated because I was informed that there may be more towers coming [through the program],” said Walder. He suggested the committee review Industry Canada policy that gives power to the municipality for its placement of cell towers “used for Internet access” and ensure that its bylaws are parallel with government standards.

“[Mike Bossio] alerted me that even though Hastings Highlands has upwards to 11, I think it's 11 communications towers, there may be a need for more,” Walder said at council.

His motion reads that the bylaw is an essential tool for the municipality, granted by Industry Canada, to retain an important level of local control for the placement, location, function and when eventually obsolete and out of use, the timely dismantling of these structure. The \$500 million government program called Connect to Innovate aims to bring broadband Internet access to 300 rural communities across Canada.

“Currently, we have communications towers for cellphones. We have satellite service that would cover anywhere in the municipality and we also have a local provider that provides fairly limited coverage if you can get that coverage it's an excellent deal,” said Walder. “These towers that may come will address the areas that do not have mobile-broadband. In other words, if you're travelling in your car and you have a smartphone you can access the Internet on a mobile. That's a facility that we don't have, and it's an important one I've gathered. When I looked at the map that shows area that do not have the mobile broadband, it's quite a large section of our municipality.”

The committee will present its findings at council's next meeting Feb. 22. Walder wanted the bylaw reviewed before the deadline to apply for Connect to Innovate March 13.