

County levy to municipalities for 2018 increases 1.8%

By Jim Eadie

Hastings County council approved their 2018 operating budget at the March 29 meeting in Belleville. Sue Horwood, director of finances for Hastings County presented the \$143.8 million budget that includes an increase in spending of \$326,882 over 2017 figures. Horwood noted that this 2.37 per cent increase in spending was offset by assessment growth for Hastings County to the tune of \$78,665, which reduces the actual increase in the levy to the municipalities to 1.80 per cent over last year.

The county level of municipal government takes care of services such as provincial offences court, planning, economic development, 911, community and human services, ambulance services, and long-term care homes.

Recent changes in employment legislation created a significant challenge according to Horwood in her report: "New legislation allows for two paid emergency leave days as part of an entitlement of 10 days previously unpaid. The 2018 budget includes additional costs of \$277,350 because of paid emergency leave."

The additional cost is to back-fill positions when staff are absent in long-term care and emergency services.

Horwood also noted the challenges of provincial funding formulas.

In the case of long-term care, funding has actually decreased. "We believe that the funding pool allocated to long-term care is inadequate, and the impact of behaviours is not properly recognized under the current funding model," said the report.

A third concern is aging infrastructure. Horwood's report noted that over 78 per cent of the 1,432 social housing units were built prior to 1979. "We are in the midst of revitalizing the housing stock by selling the scattered housing units and building new multi-residential units. Hastings Manor and Centennial Manor are now over 14 years old and are beginning to require investments in infrastructure renewal," said the report.

Hastings County council also continues to support North Hastings healthcare through the Doctor Recruitment Program, which has successfully recruited 17 candidates, some settling in Bancroft.

Last year Hastings County council also committed \$150,000 over three years to the North Hastings Hospital Fund Development for the purchase of equipment, according to the report.

Loyalist College and the Bancroft Airport receive support from the County of Hastings as well.