

McCaw takes on McComb

By Jim Eadie

Wollaston Township council has found another burr under its saddle in their ongoing disagreement with the County of Hastings planning department related to land use rules that they feel are stifling development in theirs, and other northern rural municipalities. The only source of revenue for municipalities is from property taxes, and the building or improvement of homes and businesses is the key to increased revenue, short of raising the tax rate. The provincial government sets out guidelines for the development of municipal official plans to govern land use, and the county planning department will then oversee local plans. In the past year Wollaston and other northern rural municipalities have taken the county planning department to task for what they see as an interpretation of provincial guidelines that unfairly burdens them by rules that favour urban areas, and farmland where road networks are plentiful, none of which exists in the rural north. Instead northern municipalities depend primarily on recreation, tourism, and lumbering for economic survival.

Earlier this year, Wollaston stood up to the county planning department demanding a more liberal interpretation of the rules that disallowed any further development on private roads, or unmaintained road allowances. At the time they noted that over half of the current tax revenue for the municipality comes from current development on private roads, and that vast portions of the municipality are not directly serviced by the municipal road system.

At their Aug. 12 regular meeting, the subject of the planning rules came up again in conjunction with a discussion about landowner's application for a right of way to allow access to a land locked parcel.

"I think that we should recommend that the landlocked parcel be allowed a residential building permit too," said Deputy Reeve Graham Blair. "We should be consistent that we disagree with the county position. Let's make a comment, although we do not want to hinder the application itself."

"It shouldn't hinder it, because it doesn't have any effect on his request," said Reeve Dan McCaw. "It would be in line with what we have been talking about for a while."

On Aug. 26 council again met for their next regularly scheduled meeting, and by this time McCaw had found another burr under his saddle, and had developed a little head of steam.

"In the papers that I got from county council, they are going to have a rule that on a one hundred acre parcel you can get two severances, and when they are developed you only get one more severance," said McCaw. In past times he noted, a landowner could develop two at a time, and then apply for two more.

"We have a lot of one hundred acre parcels of land in Wollaston Township," said clerk Jennifer Cohen.

"Brian (McComb ? director of planning and development for County of Hastings) is following what the province wants to a T," said McCaw. "I don't think Brian should be representing our municipalities. I think he should be listening to us, and what we need, and not to what the province wants. We have had some support from the other municipalities, and there has been back room talk. Some of them feel we should back the province. I will likely be on the road a lot as there are 14 municipalities to visit. I have all intentions of pushing this as far as I can ? we need it ? it is important to us."

Council passed a motion expressing their concerns on the matter to county council.

In another matter, council deferred the decision to purchase a new truck for the roads department for the new council to decide after the upcoming fall municipal elections.

Cohen expressed her worries about the municipal voters list, which is now in the hands of township staff. A cursory check has

revealed numerous errors, duplications and omissions. The township office staff has been proactive in ensuring increased accuracy, for example by connecting with local trailer parks to get seasonal residents correctly on or off the list.

Cohen notes that the only way to be sure you are on the voters list is to call the municipality. Residents not on the list will not receive a ?mail in? ballot, and will have to be sworn in at a polling station on Election Day if corrections are not made immediately.

Municipal voters lists in Ontario are prepared by MPAC (Municipal Property Assessment Corporation).

The 2014 Municipal elections will be held this fall on Monday, Oct. 27.