

New warden sworn in for county

By Sarah Sobanski

Stirling-Rawdon Mayor Rodney Cooney has been sworn in as Hastings County's warden.

Cooney was sworn in Dec. 8. He will serve as warden for the next two years.

"I am excited to have this opportunity to be the next warden of the county and very appreciative of the support that I have received from all members of county council," said Cooney. "I need to also thank my wife Lisa, indeed my whole family as well as the council and staff of Stirling-Rawdon for their support. It means a great deal to me."

He added, "I know the next two years will be busy ones for the county but the work that we do is essential. Our job is straightforward. We take care of individuals and families as well as help our communities grow."

Cooney's priorities for the 2017-'18 year include examining opportunities to reduce ambulance response times. He suggested in his inaugural address that county staff and Hastings-Quinte Paramedic Services chief Doug Socha work together to reduce response times. He also recognized that there are particular challenges for responding across central Hastings.

"This past year was another extremely busy one for our paramedics. They will have responded to more than 30,000 calls, an increase of 5.6 per cent over last year and 10 per cent since 2014. Our paramedics drove the equivalent of going to the Moon and back, twice. That translates into nearly 1,572,186 kilometres," said Cooney. "Given the geography and distances that they must cover, it is no wonder that there are occasions when response times to some calls are longer than we all would like."

He added, "To that end Mr. Pine, chief Socha and Ms. Horwood will together with the joint committee undertake a full review of options for the committee and ultimately county council to consider. Those options will run the gamut from modifying the current deployment plan to assessing whether new investments in ambulances or base locations along with a financial plan to support any recommendations. I hope we can get that report to council by the end of 2017."

The new warden also prioritized enacting a new official plan; bringing in responsible, affordable annual county budgets; implementing a renewed, focused economic development strategy with greater support for tourism promotion; continuing to build new affordable housing units, strengthening county information technology operations and supporting the needs of local municipalities; implementing a staff development program; completing a succession plan for the county.

"Whether it's caring for loved ones in Hastings and Centennial Manors, providing safe, secure and affordable housing to thousands of individuals and families or doing the best we can to have an ambulance available when needed, we will continue to strive for excellence in our service to the public," said Cooney.

Cooney's full comments on his plans for 2017 can be read on the [county's website](#).