

## Public health deeply affected by policy, says Mullaly

By Jim Eadie

Beth Collins, a representative of the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario and Susan Kiley Mullaly a dietitian with the Hastings and Prince Edward Counties Health Unit brought an interesting message, and a simple request to Wollaston Township council on behalf of the Healthy Communities Partnership of Hastings and Prince Edward Counties. Their project is made up of a coalition of municipalities, individuals and organizations that are promoting the consideration of public health in discussions formulating all policies by municipal governments.

"We are asking you to consider a new way of looking at the work you do," Collins told the June 24 meeting. "We have three priorities: local food, active communities and healthy eating. We are asking you to sign a declaration that you will consider health in all of your policy discussions."

"We are not here asking for money," said Kiley Mullaly. "We just bring a philosophy, promote a collaborative approach, encourage you to see what works for you, to ensure the sustainability of your community. All of this makes a community and individuals healthy. It just formalizes the great work you already do in Wollaston, making it a great place to live."

Some of the things noted by Kiley Mullaly and others during the discussion were the recreational opportunities, the pavilion, tennis and fitness opportunities, trails, Nellie Lund Park and the new bicycle trails, farmers' market, and even a chair volleyball league hosted by the Coe Hill Legion.

A survey of residents and stakeholders in the County of Hastings in 2013 turned up some interesting information about what residents want to improve their health. Strong support was voiced for support of local food growers and vendors, community gardens and public transportation systems to get customers to these food sources.

There was also very strong support for low cost and accessible recreation programs, after hour's use of school gyms and fields, parks, and trails natural areas. Additionally the surveys noted the importance of roads designed with safety for pedestrians and cyclists in mind and making it easier for children to walk or bike to school. Kiley Mullaly suggested that even good signage of current walking and biking trails is a proactive step by a municipality.

Council was told that 74 per cent of survey respondents agreed that they would be more likely to vote for a municipal candidate if he or she supports improving access to local healthy food and supports improvement of opportunities for walking, cycling or public transit.

"I support that," said Deputy Reeve Graham Blair. "We should be considering healthy options when making municipal decisions."

"It can have a great impact," said Kiley Mullaly. "Even if what is being discussed is far from a health related policy."

Council passed a resolution unanimously, promising to embrace the philosophy of considering health implications in all of their deliberations and development of public policy.

Kiley Mullaly also drew attention to the What Matters to Me campaign that will run from July 7 through October 31 and highlight what is possible in Hastings and Prince Edward counties (HPEC), when municipalities take a leadership role in building a healthy community.

Five HPEC residents representing a mix of age, gender, and geographic locations in HPEC are featured who share what matters to them, and each speaker will address a different issue. The issues addressed include: more community gardens; helping to get local food to local people; safe walking and biking; a connected parks and trails system; and affordable recreation. The campaign will include a website, posters, radio advertisements, online videos, and social media engagement.

Further information about this campaign can be obtained by contacting the health unit HPEC office in Bancroft at the North Hastings Professional Building, 1 Manor Lane; or by calling 613-332-4555; or at [healthycommunities@hpechu.on.ca](mailto:healthycommunities@hpechu.on.ca)

Also available through the Health Unit is two publications with detailed information related to community health and public policy:

1. Hastings and Prince Edward Counties Situational Assessment on Healthy Eating and Active Living ? published by Healthy Communities HPEC.
2. Building Complete and Sustainable Communities: Healthy Policies for Official Plans ? published by Health Unit HPEC.