

Report from water town hall released

By Sarah Sobanski

The community organizations that hosted the water rates town hall in March have released their findings.

A press conference was held at A Place for the Arts March 31 to release the report. Comments from the more than 100 community members who attended are filed into categories answering what impact the water and wastewater rate increase has on the town and what can be done about it.

My phone is ringing off the hook because people are paying their water bills but that means we have no money for food. So I've had at least 10 calls in the last few days of people who have no food left because their water bill has gone from \$55 to almost \$200, said North Hastings Community Trust program co-ordinator Jane Kali at the release. This is not sustainable. This will destroy our town. We know this.

The report stated that North Hastings has one of the highest poverty rates in the province. The report divides public comments into categories for solutions. According to the report the most frequent comment was to increase town revenues. It also suggested putting pressure on town council, the province and Ontario Clean Water Agency.

There was a broad consensus in the meeting that the community must look to our town council to lead us out of this crisis. People expressed disappointment with how the council came to implement these rates increases but also shared a great desire to support council in finding solutions. People seemed willing to accept compromises in other areas that would provide rate relief, reads the report.

Comments also showed people wanted to find sustainable solutions for the town over the long term, see more transparency from the town, learn and work with other towns, take back management of water systems, and to avoid selling the dump.

The report stated next steps included circulating it to the town and other interested parties as well as gathering feedback.

It stated, If the rates are not rolled back, the planning committee is ready to facilitate another town hall. This event will provide an opportunity for Bancroft town council and staff and others to speak and answer questions.

The report is available online at gnomesforjusticenorthhastings.wordpress.com. Those interested in giving feedback or attending a future meeting if it comes into fruition can contact the planning committee at gnomesforjusticenorthhastings@gmail.com or by calling 613-334-6720.