

Secondary Plan puts Bird's Creek in a good position for growth

By Nate Smelle

The Bird's Creek Secondary Plan (BCSP) was the hot topic of discussion at the March 4 meeting of Council for the municipality of Hastings Highlands. Following a report on the BCSP by chief building official Frank Mills, Rory Baksh of Dillon Consulting and Justin Harrow of Hastings County planning presented the final report and draft of the plan to council. Since the project was launched on April 28, 2011 there have been a number of 'ups and downs' in the process. These challenges are on par for the course when it comes to municipal and county planning, said Baksh because the planning process is always a learning experience for everyone involved in it. The lessons learned during the development of the BCSP are incredibly valuable to the municipality in moving forward, he explained.

'We now have the excellent foundation that we need to have for future strategic growth and development,' Baksh said.

'If in the future something significant happens to come to this community, you have your house in order to be able to then welcome that type of development. We know we can plan for the future as best as we are able to 'based on our patterns and outlook' but we never really know 100 per cent what is going to happen. The thing that is really important is to be prepared for what something really great comes along. This secondary plan allows you to do that in a way that you would not necessarily have been able to do, had you not undertaken this exercise.'

The BCSP is intended to provide a detailed land-use framework for the Hamlet of Bird's Creek. Taking into consideration the current state of the municipality in respect to provincial land-use planning policy, the BCSP identifies the most effective and efficient development patterns and opportunities on the horizon for the Hamlet until the year 2036. It was developed through a series of public consultations, where members of the community were asked about: what they thought the future of Bird's Creek should look like over the next 20 years; the type of lifestyle they appreciated and would like to see fostered as Bird's Creek grows and develops; and some of the challenges in their community that they would hope growth would address.

'Ultimately in the writing of the secondary plan it reflected a lot of those community aspirations,' said Baksh.

'The vision for Bird's Creek as articulated in the secondary plan emanates from those early days of public consultation. The design recommendations around and including some of the streetscapes really added some beauty to Bird's Creek to reflect the wonderful place that it is, and to connect back to its history and its naming. I'm glad that the secondary plan began with a foundation of community input from local citizens. That is reflected in the document in front of us today.'

A background study used to create the BCSP entitled Hastings County demographic forecasting and land demand analysis: final from July 15, 2013 forecasts that the Hamlet's population will increase by 120 people to approximately 760 persons by 2036. The same study showed an increase of 45 jobs in the Hamlet over this same 25-year period.

'We are now at a stage where we have a substantial piece of employment lands in the new property we own on 'Y' road,' said CBO Mills.

'We also have up to seven residential units that could be residential or we have also talked about the seniors' facility if we could get such funding.'

The vision of the plan is to see Bird's Creek grow at a healthy rate while at the same time enhancing its own identity and character. It pushes for the careful development of the Southwest quarter of the Hamlet with new industries and service sectors off 'Y' road. It is predicted that these developments will complement the residential areas helping them become a hub for recreation culture and special events for residents and tourists.

'There are different types of land uses in the Bird's Creek secondary plan,' said Baksh.

?There is a residential component that Frank [Mills] has identified. There are some vacant residential units, and land available for development. We have areas for non-residential developments, particularly some type of industrial or employment-type land-use, which is important to have in any community. It's important to have places to work. We also have some commercial land available for someone to open up a new store or restaurant in Bird's Creek.?

There are eight strategic directions incorporated into the BCSP. These are: to attract young residents and new families to Bird's Creek; to promote Bird's Creek is a great place to live; to highlight the heritage and history that Bird's Creek has to offer; to create a sense of identity and continuity through streetscaping, massing and urban design; strengthen and improve the visual character of the Hamlet; provide opportunities for a healthy living style through the provision of recreational pathways, improved public and private pedestrian amenities, well-planted greenways and complementary uses which encourage walking; to ensure an appropriate range of community facilities and services appropriately located to meet the needs of local residents; and, to maintain and build upon the opportunities for employment within Bird's Creek. Baksh said he was pleased to announce that the BCSP has ultimately been formulated to meet the rules and requirements for planning that apply to every community in Ontario.