

Small schools and libraries discussed in Wollaston

By Jim Eadie

The future of small North Hastings public schools, and their impact on community development and growth came up several times during the Wollaston Township regular council meeting on April 11. Local schools have received a reprieve from the threat of closure by the Hastings and Prince Edward District School Board, but only for this round of reviews.

"We are still under the gun regarding school closures," said Cathy Trimble, speaking on behalf of the North Hastings Economic Development Committee (NHEDC). "We have to be always vigilant."

In Carlow Mayo, the library is located within Hermon Public School. Trimble noted the effort there to obtain a 3D printer, supported by MP Mike Bossio who is helping to obtain a possible federal Innovation Grant for the project.

"Larger libraries in the city have these," she said. "So should we."

An important component supporting the NHEDC vision for a prosperous North Hastings that fosters sustainable economic and community development is retaining those smaller schools as community hubs.

"Our goal is no closures of elementary schools," she said. "We will work to keep elementary schools open in North Hastings. They attract families with young children to move here."

In the gallery and listening carefully was Colin Slade, chairperson of the new Wollaston library board, along with three board members. Their library is located in a portable on the Coe Hill Public School property.

"We desperately need a building," Slade told council. "I have been looking at other libraries, and I think we have some investments set aside. We don't even have a washroom."

Township treasurer Verna Brundage noted that she is in discussions with the school board with the hope to move the Wollaston Public Library into the Coe Hill Public School building.

"Trillium [grant program] has opportunities for libraries," she said, "but we need to get plans together with the school first."

Slade thanked council for quickly establishing the new library board.

"The learning curve was steep, and there is a huge amount to do," he said. "We have had six meetings in three months for a total of 17 hours. As obliged by law, we completed our policies and procedures, and now have a draft strategic plan. Our library has an important role as a community hub. Twenty-three per cent of the population do not have the Internet. The library is a safe and stimulating place for children. It makes for a vibrant community, and attracts people to our community."

Slade noted that seasonal residents and campground folks "use the library a lot in the summer."

"Our after-school program is so successful " there are 22 participants " it has outgrown the library," he said. "We are now working with the library, school board and the township to use the community centre. North Hastings Children's Centre program uses the library, which exposes children and parents to the library. Friends of the Wollaston Library, started in 2008, works to increase visibility of the library, develop it as a vibrant community resource, and promote lifelong learning. We hope in the future to reach out more to teenagers, and digital literacy for seniors. It is our wee library with heart."

Slade presented the proposed library budget for consideration by council. It is expected to be discussed at the special council draft operating budget meeting to be held at the Coe Hill Legion hall on April 18.

Figures show the library board is requesting a municipal grant for 2017 of \$29,500. This is around \$10,500 more than the 2016 budget, but represents the shortfall caused when Limerick Township pulled out of the library union effective the end of 2016. Prior to that time the municipalities shared the cost based approximately on their populations, with Wollaston paying two thirds of the total municipal grant money. At the time of the union dissolution Wollaston Township council unanimously decided to pursue a new library on its own, with the question about funding and library services to be decided at the 2017 budget considerations.