

TROUT wants to return to Hastings Highlands

By Sarah Sobanski

Community Care North Hastings wants to bring TROUT to Hastings Highlands.

Community Care's CEO Heather Inwood-Montrose attended Hastings Highlands regular council meeting Dec. 7. She asked council to set aside \$500 for specialized transit in its 2018 budget for a TROUT trip to Hastings Highlands for an event of council's choosing.

"That would help us dial into more gas tax funding in 2018. This isn't going to help us in 2017, it will help us in 2018. In return, I would like to use that money to bring people to Hastings Highlands," said Inwood-Montrose. "I would like to help you by supporting one day of service for an event in your community where we can bring seniors and people with disabilities so they can participate."

She told council, "I would love to be back in Hastings Highlands. There are so many residents here that would benefit from Community Care services. I'd love to have some of our wellness programming here and I'd love to support you in whatever way you feel would benefit your residents. I'm willing to engage in conversations about that."

Inwood-Montrose estimated one trip for TROUT to an Hastings Highlands event would cost around \$1,000. She suggested Hastings Highlands pay half and Community Care pay the remainder.

Community Care has offered accessible bus services in the community since 1989. Inwood-Montrose explained that it moved to a public transit model in 2010 due to funding from the Liberal government.

"It's been a five-year experiment and it's quite clear that in our communities it's not working the way that the hope was that it would," explained Inwood-Montrose. She suggested that with support of surrounding municipalities she could work with Ontario Public Transit Association CEO Karen Cameron to develop a transit model that would better fit the community.

"[Cameron] would be open to facilitating a transportation system bringing together taxi providers, the volunteer providers, [and] the transportation providers such as TROUT. [It would] bring together everyone to figure out what our assets are, what each organization does best, what each organization does the most efficiently and cost effectively, and put together a solution that involves everyone. That's what I'm hoping to move forward in the coming year or two."

Inwood-Montrose said she has been sitting in on a neighbouring community's public transit planning committee. It wants to develop a transit model where all accessible transit comes together for the community as well.

"TROUT is struggling. What we now have is a system with people dependent on it," stated Inwood-Montrose.

In 2015-'16 TROUT had 170 individual users of its weekly services. TROUT runs Sundays, Tuesdays and Fridays. Between 20 and 25 of those users are from Highlands East and five to 15 come from Coe Hill. Coe Hill contributes \$1,000 a year to Community Care for TROUT, while Highlands East contributes \$10,000 a year.

Inwood-Montrose intends to continue seeking support from local municipalities to grow TROUT.

"I've begun the process of having this conversation. I've booked to speak with six other municipalities within the next two weeks and in early January," she said.