

Wards petition submitted to Hastings Highlands

By Sarah Sobanski

A petition has been made to Hastings Highlands council to equalize its voting system.

Hastings Highlands residents Jim McPherson, Marjory McPherson and Harold Harris visited the Hastings Highlands Centre Dec. 12 with the petition. On it were 139 signatures of citizens looking for council to fix the municipality's ward imbalances.

Jim McPherson said he was planning on submitting the petition to Hastings Highlands in two months. He'd been working with former clerk and manager of corporate services Robyn Rogers to see council through changing its election system.

According to a municipal release, council has severed its employment relationship with Rogers as a result of structural realignment. Rogers had been with the municipality since 2007. She hosted a public meeting on behalf of council and municipal staff to discuss election imbalances with local constituents in late November.

She was shepherding us through on this. She was very professional. We decided there's no sense waiting now, said Jim McPherson. He said he felt there was no one to champion the issue with Rogers gone.

Rogers was working with the trio, and others supporting the change, to create a solution without them having to petition the Ontario Municipal Board for results.

Robyn got a quote of \$18,000 to redraw the lines, you have to add onto that lawyers fees, said Jim McPherson, though *Bancroft This Week* couldn't get in contact with Rogers to confirm.

That's if you redraw the lines. You have to have an outside person come in and redraw the lines, [who will be] disinterested, said Marjory McPherson.

Council now has 90 days to act before the petition can be submitted to the OMB. Jim McPherson noted that when the 90 days runs out he can submit the petition, but he doesn't have to. He can submit the petition to the OMB at any time after the 90 day period so he could potentially give council more time.

I don't know why they forgot about this when they amalgamated. They didn't do anything about it. They could have redrawn the lines then, said McPherson.