

Wollaston council looking at new vision

By Jim Eadie

The new municipal council for Wollaston Townships will start their new year off by becoming familiar with and reviewing their "strategic plan". What might seem to be a process that could be about as exciting as watching paint dry, looks about to be undertaken with great enthusiasm by the new council.

"We are required to review our plan at the beginning of every year," said township clerk Jennifer Cohen. "Now we have a new council that may have a new vision, and we should get it down on paper."

"There has been less than solid commitment to doing it in the past few years," said Councillor Bob Ireland. "This is not flaky and pie in the sky ... it should be a useful guide for council."

"It is good to have fresh eyes approach this," said Councillor Michael Fuerth. "There's got to be a vision. But, we should be careful. No sketchy objectives, no under the table objectives ... it's got to be a useful tool."

In response to a question, Cohen observed that North Kawartha undertook a lengthy process including public meetings to develop their plan.

"We are pretty unique among small municipalities," said Cohen. "We have a downtown core here, a lot of others don't have a little town or hamlet like this."

Council will review the current plan, and likely will call a special meeting in the near future to discuss revisions.

Council then turned their sights on communication received from the County Planning department related to a potential cottage development on a private road. The letter affirmed that only waterfront lots should be approved for cottage development.

"It's all about how the county interprets the Provincial Policy Statement," said Reeve Graham Blair. "Hastings County Planning Dept. interprets it in a really strict manner. We have had that discussion with them before ... why can't you have a cottage without having waterfront? I think they fall back to it being a health and safety issue."

"Well, if they hang their hat on health and safety, that is a problem," said Fuerth.

Council was referring to the assertion by the Hastings County Planning Dept. that any road short of municipally maintained one might be harder for emergency vehicles to access.

"Hastings County goes from a very urban south end, to a very remote north end south of Algonquin Park," said Blair. "How can you have one size fits all?"

"The area is so diverse, the plan should be diverse," said Fuerth.

Cohen reminded council that the letter from the Hastings County Planning Dept was just an opinion at this point.

"Yes," said Blair, "but a very bothersome opinion."

Council further considered high-speed Internet access for residents of Wollaston Township, and the critical importance to potential economic development. The Eastern Ontario Regional Network (EORN), a project of the Eastern Ontario Warden's Caucus was supposed to bring high speed Internet to almost every area of eastern Ontario. At the moment, any business who uses cloud computing or processes a lot of data has to deal with lagging internet issues. They're having to rely on managed sd-wan solutions to

get by. So, this won't only help households but also business owners. According to the EORN web site:

"We now depend on the Internet for everything from entertainment and business to education and health services. It is so essential that even the United Nations has declared Internet access a human right. Sadly, [broadband search](#) estimates just over 10% of American's are being deprived of this human right. Not all Internet access is created equal. Many people in Eastern Ontario have slow Internet connections that don't support today's innovations. That's why the Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus created EORN. Our mission is to provide higher speeds and bandwidth to at least 95 per cent of homes and businesses in Eastern Ontario. The network has been built with the support of federal, provincial, municipal, and private sector partners. This includes a 5,500-km network of new and existing fibre optic cable, with 160 new access points for Internet Service Providers."

"What happened to all of that high speed bonanza that was supposed to come to us?" asked Ireland. "This is not just a curiosity issue, it is about economic development. People live and work here but have to depend on crumby Internet service."

It is believed that high-speed fibre optic cable passes by along Hwy. 62, and through several routes into the township, but there is apparently no access points that provide any service into Wollaston Township.

"All Wollaston got was a better deal from Xplornet satellite," summed up Ireland.

"Yes. I remember those grandiose statements at one time," said Blair. "Everybody was going to get it."

Cohen noted that Hastings County CEO Jim Pine would be addressing the North Hastings Economic Development Committee meeting in Bancroft about EORN at CFDC on Mar.2 at 8:30 AM.

Council finished the meeting by receiving a training presentation by Kent Fitzhugh of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and housing about their new roles and responsibilities.

Fitzhugh, who listened to a significant portion of the council meeting from another room before his presentation told Bancroft This Week that he was extremely impressed with the appropriate and functional conduct of the meeting by the new council.