



Township of McKellar

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Council Report to the McKellar Community September 8, 2020

INTRODUCTION

It has been a while since the February electronic newsletter and the January 2020 Mayor's Annual Report, and I felt it was time to give everyone a brief update on what has been accomplished and what exciting things we are working on in the Township.

COVID-19

A "State of Emergency" was declared for the Township on March 12, 2020. All municipal facilities were closed to the public and municipal events were cancelled. The Emergency Management Committee (EMC), consisting of the Mayor, the Clerk, the Public Works Superintendent and the Fire Chief have been meeting every Tuesday morning to oversee issues related to the pandemic and to ensure that we do everything we can to keep our community safe and free of the spread of COVID-19. Numerous press releases have been issued over the last six months to ensure we've kept in close communication with our residents. We have carefully and safely re-opened some events and facilities under strict protocols as outlined by the Health Unit and the Province. We are however still in a State of Emergency as are other area Municipalities, in anticipation of a spike in COVID-19 cases as schools reopen and flu season is upon us.

This means that many of our special community activities and events are on hold until further notice. The McKellar Fall Fair has been cancelled for the first time in 145 years, with hopes of returning in 2021. While our senior's card groups and other recreational activities are anxious to start playing again, we will continue to be vigilant and gradually and safely open up our Community Centre only when it is safe to do so. In the meantime, be safe, follow health and safety protocols with social distancing, wearing facemasks, using hand sanitizers and frequent hand washing in consideration of yourself and those around you.

We will continue to try and hold public meetings, but have run into some technical difficulties which we are trying to correct. Being open, transparent and involved with our community is fundamental to our moving forward. On behalf of Council I would like to sincerely thank everyone for their understanding and due diligence in fighting this pandemic. We would especially like to thank all of our front line support and health workers and citizens of McKellar for working on our behalf to provide the necessities to get through this together.

POSITIVE HAPPENINGS IN 2020 – SO FAR

Financial

The 2019 Auditor's Report showed we are in good financial health, with a surplus going forward into 2020. We have managed to keep the 2020 tax rate increase at 0.49%, keeping in consideration the effects of COVID-19 on our community. We are still making improvements to our roads, community services, enhancing our environment, implementing aspects of the Action Plan, while planning for future longer term projects. Penalties and interest have been waived on tax payments until the State of Emergency is lifted.

Staffing

As often happens in organizations, staff move on to other opportunities from time to time and for various reasons, as is the case in the Township of McKellar.

That said we are looking to the future in McKellar as we recruit for two key vacancies in the organization. We have recently engaged the services of an Executive Search specialist and will shortly be advertising for the positions of CAO/Clerk and Treasurer. The Executive Search specialist will assist Council in finding the best candidates to fill these two very important roles. In the mean time we have several people helping us on a part time, interim basis.

We are also excited about being very close to completing an Efficiency Study with a consultant who has looked at numerous service areas in the Township (i.e. Clerks Department, Treasury Services, Planning Services, By-law Services, Administration and Building Department Services). This project was funded through the Provincial Modernization Grant program. The recommendations in this study will help Council consider personnel needs that will best serve the residents and ratepayers of McKellar Township as we evolve and grow. The future in McKellar is promising and exciting with many wonderful initiatives on the horizon. We look forward to welcoming new staff in the near future, as well as adjusting roles and responsibilities of current staff as needed.

Ad-Hoc Committee Developments

The Road Services Review Ad-Hoc Committee has worked very hard to develop a much needed new Roads Policy which ensures we find positive ways to improve our roads and their safety. Over the next year major changes will occur for numerous road groups in McKellar. Many thanks to Councillor Carmichael and his very active and open committee in bringing our roads into 2020.

The Business, Economic Development and Tourism Ad-hoc Committee has been active in finding ways to improve our business community and to look at opportunities to promote our business and tourism based economy while taking a longer term view of future development in McKellar. A major piece of land has been purchased and an RFP is being developed to look at the possibility of relocating the Public Works Department and creating a new and viable commercial space for future development. A special thanks to Councillor Ancinelli and his entrepreneurial members for taking a longer term view of future opportunities for McKellar, to market our strengths and to create and oversee new and exciting developments.

The Stewardship and Environment Ad-hoc Committee has been proactive in identifying key major issues affecting the beauty of our surroundings and the quality of our lakes. We have reviewed many documents and listened to many experts over this past year. Our first approach was to develop a sustainable future, while at the same time developing longer term actions and resolutions to ensure we are all working together to preserve and protect our community. Council has been very supportive of many of the Committee's resolutions. Thank you to Mayor Hopkin's and his highly motivated committee for all their hard work. Please refer to our recent Environment and Lake Stewardship Report to Council and the community (September 8, 2020) and our First Annual Clean up Our Lakes special project (August 29, 2020)

Ongoing Projects

We published a long electronic newsletter to the website in February with a notice of its publication provided in every interim tax bill. We are currently in the process of creating a new Township website; the 'going live' date has not yet been established however we expect this to be late 2020 or early 2021. We have published and circulated our new Township and Business Directory thanks to the hard work of Phil Boyd, Julia Archer and Ina Watkinson. Our future directories will be electronic in nature.

We have revised and updated a number of important By-laws over the year and plan to finalize our Zoning By-law before Christmas if possible.

The McKellar Market has been very successful under the leadership of Market Manager, Jan Gibson. Jan has worked very hard to develop strict protocols to ensure the market opened safely in July and the attendance has been excellent. An outdoor Thanksgiving Market is planned for October 10th from 10 am to 1 pm. Thank you Jan for all your hard work.

The Township receives excellent press coverage and promotion in the Parry Sound North Star with the McKellar News Column by Joyce Hopkins.

FUTURE ACTIONS AND INITIATIVES

- A new boat launch will be installed to replace the one on Lakeshore
- We will receive and review the RFP regarding the relocation of the Public Works Department
- We will be undertaking a Road Needs Study under the direction of Greg Gostick, Road Superintendent in support of creating an Asset Management Plan next year
- We will develop a Request for Information (RFI) to look at new commercial businesses that may want to relocate to our Community and the space where the current Public Works Building is located
- We will implement a new long term staffing plan by year end
- We will be reviewing the recommendations of the Efficiency Study Report this fall
- We are looking to develop a plan to create high speed connectivity in McKellar and the area
- We are looking forward to celebrating all our community volunteers
- We will continue to hold public meetings with the Business and Environmental Ad-hoc Committees
- We will receive and review a report on a new Wellness and Aquatic Centre in WPS
- We are working with community groups regarding the collecting of bottles
- We are revising various organizational aspects of the Volunteer Fire Department
- A new McKellar website will be up and running in the future
- We are looking for to safety reopening municipal facilities, programs and events to the public when it is safe to do so
- Starting September 8th, we are holding only one Council meeting per month, on the second Tuesday, with Special meetings called as necessary.

Please refer to our website for all minutes and recordings of meetings for more information.

We thank everyone for your patience, understanding and support through this difficult time of COVID-19. Council and staff have worked overtime on everyone's behalf to sustain our services, projects and operations while taking a longer view of positive actions to come. We will continue to keep everyone informed and involved in Council happenings.

Reach out to any member of Council or staff if you have any questions or concerns. Your input is always encouraged and appreciated.

Respectfully,

Mayor Hopkins, and Councillors Ancinelli, Carmichael, Haskim and Kekkonen.