

Road Improvement Issues in HH

Let's get this out of the way early: Hastings Highlands has a lot of roads, just under 500 km worth at last count. And Hastings County has effectively none, despite the fact that the Municipal Act sees roads as a primary service of both the county and the municipal levels governments. And when Highway 62 was downloaded to the County over 20 years ago, the next day they downloaded it to Hastings Highlands including a minuscule payment from the province for the capital and operating costs. This is history.

Since that time a couple of decades ago, there has been much handwringing by our local politicians about how unfair all of the above is, but little in the way of constructive or strategic action.

Back a few years ago I predicted we would need about \$2.5MM for at least 4 years to get our portion of this road in proper shape. And we got a start with ICIP grants that allowed us to do a portion in 2020. But as was reported in the recent council minutes, we still have 23 km to go and the cost is now estimated at about \$14MM which for a municipality that normally spends about \$4.5MM on roads annually is significant. And now the pandemic situation has made grant monies very difficult to get. Your council suggests strong advocacy with the provincial government. Should we count on that?

This problem is just 23km of our 500 km of roads. How are we doing on the other 95%? Here is what I said in 2017: *Transportation Services (Roads, Streetlights). The swings in spending here are significant. Overall spending is up 39% over 10 years, but appears to have dropped in the past 5 years. Regardless, we are not seeing spending on Roads growing at nearly the rate of overall expenses. In 2006 roads were about half our spending; lately that is down to 40%. I wonder if this is what ratepayers want?*

News flash: the folks I talk to are way more concerned about "the other 95%" than the 23km. So what is the plan here?

Well to bring this up to date to 2020, in 2016 a major study was completed on our roads and then a plan was put in place for improvements that runs to 2029. 2020 spending, both capital and operating will be up about \$1MM from 2017 and will be about 49% of our total spending, so the message to council in 2017 seems to have been heard...or has it?

Forecast spending sees roads dropping back to 46% of spending in 2021. Now spending dollars is not a good metric for quality road improvements or maintenance, and I hear many more constituents fretting about the state of our roads today than I did in 2017. While we now have a plan for upgrades, our roads /bridges construction reserves are still about \$1.3 MM at the end of 2020 and for 2021 our reserves are forecast to fall by 1/3 for roads and bridges, suggesting we have much less to do in the future. And some major roads like South Baptiste Lake Road are not even mentioned as requiring any capital investment up and including 2029. Many constituents would disagree with this. You can see the updated roads plan through to 2029 here: <https://hastingshighlands.ca/services/roads/>

Aggravating this roads issue is of course the fact that many more constituents have been using their HH residences during the pandemic not just during the relatively benign months of summer but the more challenging months as well. So expectations of well serviced roads will continue to grow

So let's stop fretting about Highway 62 and worry a whole lot more about the other 95% of our roads and do some better planning to bring these up to an acceptable standard. Maybe I missed it, but I don't recall any public meetings on what ratepayers thought the roads priorities in HH should be to 2029.

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