

Melancthon candidates? forum held to educate voters

Written By **Paula Brown**

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Melancthon resident laid out their biggest concerns to council candidates ahead of the upcoming municipal election during a community forum this week.

On Tuesday (Sept. 13), a candidates' forum was held at the Horning's Mills Community Hall from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. The two-hour long meeting saw roughly 75 people attend, and bring forward their questions and concerns to candidates.

Attending the event were 11 of the 13 candidates vying for a spot on the five-member council.

While residents spoke to a number of issues, specific areas of concern were highlighted by community members: speeding and community togetherness.

Speeding

Speeding on roadways in the Township of Melancthon was one of the first issues raised by residents during the Tuesday evening forum.

Mayoral candidate, Wayne Hannon was questioned on his plans, if elected, to address speeding concerns.

"Most successfully we have used the digital counters and the collected data. We extrapolated the data, provided the peak time and where the problems were to police to let them focus on that timeframe for that road; and that was quite successful," said Hannon. "I think we can use limited use of the bollard or speed bump. We tried lowering the speed limits, but if they don't respect 80 km, they don't respect 60 km."

James McLean, a candidate for deputy mayor, was asked about plans to expand the speed gate pilot project currently underway in Horning's Mills, to the other smaller communities.

"When we put the speed gates up, it was after consulting with other municipalities that used it and showed speed slowing down quite a bit. We're tracking the data so we have the average speeds before them and now we've got data on the average speed after them. We haven't seen it yet, but I think it will really depend on what the impact is having," said McLean.

Community Togetherness, Ratepayers Integrity Commission and legal costs

It has been no secret that inner conflicts have plagued the 2018-2022 term of councillors. Over the term of council, a number of integrity commission reports have been provided to council following code of conduct complaints. Most recently a libel lawsuit was served by Councillor Margaret Mercer against the Township and Mayor Darren White.

Mercer was questioned about how she would foster togetherness on council if elected.

"Our township has experience conflict over the past term, much of it's the result of new council member like me wanting a different way of doing business and that includes greater collaboration, and a more open and transparent governance," said Mercer. "I would like to see a couple things. First of all, better training and orientation of council members. I also plan to introduce a more customer service-oriented model of dealing with residence."

Another question directed at Mercer asked why taxpayers were the ones to pay for the various Integrity Commission reports, based on complaints made by Mercer.

?The Integrity Commissioner service is usually a last resort,? said Mercer. ?We try to resolve things first with members of council, which I attempted to do. When this is not successful the only method available to us to contact the IC to look into council conduct.?

White was questioned on whether the ratepayers would be responsible for his legal costs in the libel suit.

?Right now, because it is myself and the township that are being sued, the only thing we've had to pay for so far is the retainer of the deductible of the insurance policy,? said White. ?However, when it does go to court, I will be retaining my own legal council and I will be paying out of pocket.?

A follow up question inquired how much the township had incurred in legal costs for the libel suit.

White said the township has had to pay \$7,500.

The candidate's forum concluded at 9 p.m.

The Melancthon election for council will take place on Oct. 24

Mayor Candidates:

? Darren White (incumbent mayor)

? Wayne Hannon

Deputy Mayor Candidates:

? James McLean

? Margaret Mercer

Councillor Candidates:

? Alex Banks

? Bill Neilson

? Brian Dawson

? Darcy Timmins

? David Miller

? Loretta McKellar

? Ralph Moore

? Ruth Plowright

? Sean Malloy