

Here are the highlights from the regular Lanark County Council meeting held Wednesday, Feb. 18.

- **County Seeks Reimbursement over SAMS Issues:** Following an impassioned account by staff about the litany of serious challenges and problems associated with the implementation of the province's new Social Assistance Management System (SAMS) software, council is asking the province to fully reimburse the municipality for all associated costs it has incurred. At last week's community services committee of the whole meeting, Ontario Works Manager Tammy Kealey-Donaldson outlined the scope of the difficulties faced by clients and community partners since SAMS was implemented on Nov. 11, 2014. SAMS was intended to improve customer service, client data management, service planning and delivery, and audit capacity and accountability. Ms. Kealey-Donaldson indicated Lanark County and other staff across the province expressed concerns during testing sessions about the readiness of SAMS prior to its province-wide launch, and there have been problems since day one. "Since implementation, staff have been limited in what regular case management duties they have been able to perform," she reported. She said staff have had to focus on ensuring financial entitlements are delivered, while abandoning regular meetings with clients to discuss employment plans or follow-up, as well as referrals to employment opportunities, workshops or school activities. The ongoing issues have caused many delays in processing information, as well as unnecessary duplication, errors, inefficiency and a huge backlog of work. Staff have had to manually verify all payments since many errors are being generated by the system. She explained "fixes" are occurring every day, which need to be conveyed to staff and have become overwhelming, and that the ongoing frustration and inability to sustain meaningful contact with clients is taking a toll on staff. "It would certainly be a sad casualty of this implementation if Lanark County Ontario Works were to lose skilled and valued staff." Although the province provided a total of \$124,600 in additional funding related to the implementation, the report indicates this does not sufficiently cover all additional costs, such as overtime, reallocation of staff to focus on implementation, the need for additional staff resources, and costs related to additional printing, mailing and staff training. Council has also asked for a definitive timeframe for when all SAMS deficiencies will be addressed and when it will be fully functional, and also asked that the province invest the necessary human and financial resources to correct the deficiencies and to develop and provide an updated and comprehensive training curriculum with increased onsite support to municipal staff in the interim. County staff were recognized and thanked by managers and councillors for their ongoing efforts to ensure clients experience the least amount of disruption possible. "Our clients represent the most vulnerable segment of our population and have remained our priority throughout this implementation," Ms. Kealey-Donaldson said. The issue will also be raised at the upcoming Ontario Good Roads Association/Rural Ontario Municipal Association conference in Toronto next week. For more information, contact Nancy Green, Director of Social Services, at 1-888-9-LANARK, ext. 2101 or Tammy Kealey-Donaldson, Ontario Works Manager, ext. 2110.

- **Council Support Mississippi Mills Motion:** Council passed a resolution to support the Town of Mississippi Mills in its request that the province consider granting municipalities the authority to control the design, placement and scale of any structure related to hydro generation in urban heritage cores. The move comes in light of a hydro generation expansion project in historic downtown Almonte. The town has had no approval authority because the project is covered by the Class Environmental Assessment process. The town's position is that this project affects tourism, business and quality of life while having limited economic benefit to the ratepayers of Mississippi Mills. The Mississippi River runs through the urban core, where a series of waterfalls and built

heritage are principle drivers of the tourism sector, which stand to be altered by the proposed expansion. The town is advocating for the authority to treat such projects in the same way any industrial project would be managed. The motion is being widely circulated. For more information, contact Leslie Drynan, Deputy Clerk, at 1-888-9-LANARK, ext. 1502.

- **Proceeding with Ambulance Base:** Council has authorized staff to proceed with a design-build request for proposal for a Smiths Falls land ambulance base. This follows a decision by Smiths Falls council that it would not be proceeding with the renovation of its town hall to accommodate a new ambulance base. The current base is located at 10 Maple Ave. and no longer meets the needs of the Lanark County Paramedic Service in terms of size and design. The county's lease of the current building expires this November. County staff will work with LCPS to draw up the requirements for a new base that will allow for future expansion as required. A design-build RFP would allow for the possibility of renovating an existing building in the town. For more information, contact Rick Hannah, Emergency Services Coordinator, at 1-888-9-LANARK, ext. 1701.
- **Upcoming Meetings: County Council, Wednesday, March 11, 5 p.m.;** Community Services, March 11 (following County Council); Corporate Services, March 11 (following Community Services). **County Council, Wednesday, March 25, 5 p.m.;** Economic Development, March 25 (following County Council); Public Works, March 25 (following Economic Development); **Special County Council, March 25 (following Public Works).** For more information, contact 1-888-9-LANARK, ext. 1502. Like "LanarkCounty1" on Facebook and follow "@LanarkCounty1" on Twitter!