

## **Mayor's report to the community of Birch Hills February 29, 2024**

This past summer we initiated an inspection of some of the sewer lines that have been causing us issues over the past year, this resulted in bringing in a hydrovac unit to clean some of the lines. It is our intention to continue this practice this summer again with the inspection and repair of lines and manholes that need attention. Several manholes were identified as needing repair and we are looking at lining some meters of older sewer lines that we identified as questionable. The downtown and older part of the town has had only minor repairs since it was installed in the 1960's and the time has arrived for much needed maintenance of our sewer infrastructure.

We have returned to weekly garbage pickups after trying biweekly service over the past winter. This was an experiment that we thought would result in significant cost savings, which in the end only resulted in a saving of a few thousand dollars and didn't produce the anticipated results. We believe that some residents saw it as an opportunity to be more responsible in the management of their trash, and we did see an uptick in the recycling of materials. Each year our trash management budget is about \$100,000.00.

We would like to compliment our staff for attention to detail that allows the Town to function well in today's busy times. We have added some newer equipment to our inventory, the cost of which is spread over several years and are also in the process of completing the upgrade to our water plant with the support of funding from the provincial and federal governments. Completion has been delayed by the absence of some electrical equipment for the project. We expect the project to be completed by May of 2024.

As a community and in conjunction with the RM of Birch Hills we are fortunate to have a very active Fire Department with currently 21 volunteers on staff. It is our responsibility to ensure their safety and that the operation of the Department is viable. In 2024, the Fire Department will have increased rates (current SGI rates). Those rates were determined by a joint meeting of the Town and RM Councils at the end of January. RM residents are encouraged to have adequate fire coverage on their insurance policies as the RM is not required by legislation to provide fire services to their residents. The Town is required to provide fire protection to all the current residents of town with no cost incurred by the individual; however, you should carry fire protection insurance for your personal assets as that is not a responsibility of the Town. The Town and RM are tasked with supporting and equipping the Fire Department with training and equipment. We appreciate the commitment that all our current fire fighters have undertaken and we should all encourage and acknowledge the current fighters. Thank you to each person on staff and to everyone who has made the effort to be part of the Fire Department in the past and future.

We also want to acknowledge all the work and leadership that volunteers provide within this community. Without the support, time and energy from all of you, we would not have the services that are available for all of us. Whether it is volunteers at the Nursing Home, the Curling Rink, the Legion, the local Museum, the Skating Rink, the local churches, Dance Centre, the Seniors Club, the Golf Course, or any of the many other boards that provide for the needs of

our Town. You each add value to our community, and if you are interested in serving your community, there is always a place for another set of hands and personality.

In upcoming issues of the Heartbeat, we will see reports from organizations within our community who provide services that make our town a place where we all enjoy living. I also encourage these organizations and our community to consider who we could recognize as a volunteer of the year for 2024. If you wish to nominate someone, please complete a letter that would recognize their contributions to our town and present it to our Rec. Director for consideration.

2025 is a year for assessment adjustments by SAMA. The results which have not been shared with us at this time and the budget process is only in the development stage, no decisions as to the municipal tax has been made or even forecasted at this time. We would like to remind you all that we are in an inflationary period that we haven't seen since the 1970's and that fixed income earners are at great risk during an inflationary period and that all expenses are impacted.