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The Highlander

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INSIDE: THE NUTCRACKER IN PHOTOS PAGE 15

FREE



Wasn't that a party...

Lindsay Watling holds Teaha at a public skate at the A.J. LaRue Arena Dec. 8 during the Haliburton Rotary Christmas party. See more coverage on page 12. *Photo by Lisa Gervais.*

Ombudsman: closed meeting broke the rules

By Lisa Gervais

Ontario's Ombudsman has rapped the County of Haliburton's knuckles over an April 27 closed door meeting that Paul Dubé said should not have been held in-camera.

Dubé issued his ruling this month over complaints filed with his office. He said the council meeting, which dealt with the pending closure of the Minden emergency room, "did not fit within the closed meeting exceptions in the Municipal Act."

Council called the special meeting, inviting then HHHS CEO Carolyn Plummer and board chair David O'Brien, "to gather more information... and to attempt to reverse or delay the closure," Dubé said. "We were told that an in-camera discussion was planned because the County hoped the HHHS representatives would be more willing to have a full and frank discussion with council in closed session than in public," the ombudsman added.

He said the County claimed exceptions in sections 239(2)(g) and 239(2)(i) of the Act. Section 239(2)(g) allows a municipality to discuss a matter in which a council, board, committee, or other body may hold a closed meeting under another Act. Section 239(2)(i) is an exception for information supplied in confidence to the municipality by a third party.

According to the closed session minutes, and the people Dubé's team interviewed, Plummer and O'Brien had an opportunity to speak to council about the decision. O'Brien explained HHHS' rationale and shared information about staffing levels, labour relations, and bed capacity at the two County hospitals. Dubé said O'Brien and Plummer also provided a plan to ensure patients could access emergency services at Haliburton hospital following the closure.

Continued 'Warden' on page 2

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