

Declining roads subsidies force cutbacks in Cramahe

By Eileen Argyris

Cramahe Reeve Stuart Oliver believes, "If a municipality is not going ahead, it is falling behind."

Major challenges facing Cramahe Township in the year 1997 will be "trying to run the municipality in the black on current revenues," he said last week.

In spite of the fact that the township has \$1.3 million in reserves, Mr. Oliver says cuts in provincial grants will mean, "We'll either have to cut back on spending or increase taxes."

"It's not likely we'll use reserves (to meet current expenses) — they're for emergency situations."

As always, the biggest concern in the township is roads.

"That's where 90 per cent of our money goes," Mr. Oliver stated.

He told the *Chronicle*, he always stresses to the

roads crews that roads must be kept up, especially in rural municipalities like Cramahe, because, "this is what the taxpayers see for their money."

However, he said the current squeeze between declining provincial funding and a taxation level that the council will not want to see increased, may mean a decrease in roads service.

That could mean less salting and sanding and slower or less frequent plowing, the reeve admitted.

"It could mean stepping back maybe 20 or 25 years, as far as keeping the roads sanded and plowed," he acknowledged.

"One thing is for sure, if we keep up as we have been doing, it's going to take away someplace else, because the grants just aren't there in the road end."

Since it was elected in June, 1995, the current

Ontario government of the Mike Harris Tories has followed a pattern of fiscal austerity and downloading of costs that has seen municipalities bearing more and more of the burden of their own desired improvements and necessary services.

"If we get a bad winter from Jan. 1 on, there could be a lot of our money spent for the coming year," the reeve cautioned.

Mr. Oliver said, in the past, the township has established a trend of hard-topping a few more miles of road every year.

However, this year, he said the roads department would probably have to start looking at redoing some of the hard-topped roads that are starting to break up.

And there will not likely be funds to add more hard-top in other areas.

"We will try to do as much in '97 as finances permit," he promised.

Colborne Chronicle
Jan 2/97