

## *Municipally Yours,*

*(This column picks up from last month responding to issues raised in a letter to the local newspapers by a frustrated taxpayer from Athol.)*

### **High Speed Internet**

High speed internet was contracted for by the Municipality primarily to connect the various work sites of the County staff which stretch from the Public Works site in Ameliasburgh to the Mariners' Museum at South Bay. Piggy backing that effort, without additional cost to the taxpayers, was an opportunity to extend high speed internet access to the rural and more remote areas of the County. It hasn't worked to my satisfaction - but it hasn't cost taxpayers more money. As well, the initial money spent by the Municipality was recovered over time through reduced fees on the service provided. To be considered for the task advertised by the Municipality, companies had to go through the normal bidding process required. Thank goodness open market competition has subsequently assisted in getting us service in the south. Picton and Wellington didn't need high speed - they have private company cable access - but as taxpayers they have helped pay for the infrastructure that is required to do municipal business and is being extended to rural citizens.

### **The Rec Plex.**

There has been much public debate over the merits and appropriateness of supporting the *provision of services* formerly provided by the "Rec Plex." There has also been debate about supporting the Rec Plex as a building. I voted to support the new organization, PEFAC ( Prince Edward Fitness and Aquatic Centre) providing services in a space of their choosing - in this case the only pool site for now. Given the information we have seen, I think the operation has the potential to pay for itself with a hand up over the next couple of years - driven by paying users. The number of users at the time of the decision was about 1200 with significant use by both youth and seniors. Most importantly to me, the figures for Milford and Area totaled 99. And our population figure is around 1000. I had many people from the township contact me about supporting

it, because they and/or family members used it. I had two people contact me who were against it - after the vote happened.. Taxpayers put about \$125,000 into each of the two ice arenas and \$9000 into Mount Tabor "arena" per year. We have also supported the Regent Theatre with a \$50,000 grant and a \$42,000 grant over the last two years. The PEFAC ( like the Regent Theatre) is being run by a volunteer group. PEFAC is seeking incorporation and non-profit status, so the organization (not the building directly) will be eligible for charitable donations and grants. The current space is rented under terms very similar to other non-residential occupation for privately owned buildings. This group is also looking at planning for a future permanent site - a consultant hired to do this by the municipality would probably cost a minimum of \$50,000. I'd rather see some kids learn to swim with that tax money, be entertained, and be safer in the future when they go swimming in the waters around this island . We have spent a lot of time focusing on youth with this term of Council, ensuring they have input and things to do in the County. We have used tax dollars to support a variety of spaces and places for them to entertain themselves. The PEFAC ( Prince Edward Fitness and Aquatic Centre) provides 7 days a week of services that cost \$5.00 per week, less than the price of one show at the Regent, for a child 13 or under. It's \$7.00 per week for a young person 14 to the age of 21. Adults pay more - up to \$67.41/month. There is an assistance mechanism for those with limited financial resources. The medical community have been in total agreement on PEFAC's merits in supporting the full range of health care to citizens and are partnering to provide several clinics at the site - and accessing provincial government funding to go with it. In my considerable research before voting, I talked to the Recreation Dept for the City of Belleville - a city also without their own pool. Each year they spend \$100,000 to support the provision of pool-based programs for their citizens in other spaces. I know this is a much cheaper way of providing a service than for the municipality to be building, owning and operating such a site. For me, there is no discussion about whether the service is needed. Rather, it is a determination of the most economical way to provide it as a steward of tax dollars. Given my latest tax bill, the current approach makes the most sense. But if you're

*Continued on page 6*