

Bancroft council gets down to work



By Tony Pearson

Bancroft town council took a few steps last week to improve its roads and utilities, as well as to regularize its finances, in preparation for the coming financial year.

The council agreed to use the funding coming in from the province's Community Infrastructure Fund to put two kilometres of surface on Quarry Road. They also agreed to seek more money through this fund to replace the water line from the treatment plant to Hastings Street.

Looking for more provincial grant money, they agreed to apply to the Small Communities Fund to extend the town sewer further north. This, it was contended, has been the town's expressed hope for some time, in order to provide incentives for more businesses north of town; thus, the township reps asserted, it was not solely prompted by the rumour of a new "Big Box" store which might open in the area.

In terms of protection for downtown Bancroft, Mayor Bernice Jenkins noted that the township and county would be bringing forth economic strategic plans in the near future, which would include plans to strengthen the downtown core. One new concern was the suggested move of the LCBO, now in the Legion building. The mayor and finance chair Paul Jenkins have met with the Bancroft Business Improvement Association to discuss the implications of such a move.

In terms of events to boost the local economy, BBIA chair Peter Whitehead and executive director Chris Drost presented a study on the 2014 Wheels/Water/Wings event which claimed that those who attended spent nearly a million dollars over the weekend. Council agreed to give an advance grant of \$3,000 to line up entertainment for the 2015 event. Councillor Barry McGibbon observed that the economic impact of the midway was questionable, as the operators took the money out of town. Drost indicated that the midway would be scaled down this year. Whitehead added that there would be more opportunities for local non-profit agencies such as North Hastings Children's Services and the Knights of Columbus to stage fund-raising events.

Looking ahead to the summer, Council will contact local groups and other municipalities "to gauge interest in participating in Canada Day 2015 festivities hosted by the town of Bancroft" (last summer, the Township did not organize any such activities). The town will also apply for a federal "Celebrate Canada" grant.

One major financial item was the agreement to issue a one-million dollar debenture to cover a number of unfunded capital expenditures still left from two councils ago. These included about \$400,000 from the "Build Bancroft" project, and \$250,000 for waste disposal site development.

According to Finance Chair Paul Jenkins, the amount has been "floating" for some time, in and out of the township's line of credit, depending on the revenue status at the time. However, when he called for a cash-flow analysis last fall, consulting treasurer Craig Davidson noted that the town would reach the limit of its short-term borrowing capacity early in the new year; hence the need to stabilize the sum as long-term planned debt.

Payments on the loan will cost about \$114,000 a year for the next ten years, or \$14,000 a year in interest. Taking into account recent debt which the township is retiring, the net increase to borrowing costs will be about \$75,000 a year. Jenkins emphasized that the previous council had not added to the overall Bancroft debt during its term of office; these debts were incurred before 2011. He did note that it reinforced the need to "watch every penny".

New expenditures for 2015 likely include improvements to the waste disposal site, where the [cardboard bailer](#) remains out of action.

Discussions continue with Loyalist College on potential work on the next phase of the site's development.

The town's CAO, Hazel Lambe, also advised that the heating system at the township offices has already broken down once this fall, and repairs will be necessary; a report is in preparation.

A report on road improvement priorities is also due shortly; the roads studied included Snow Road, Chemaushgon, Battelle, Bronson, and Pinnacle, in addition to Quarry Road. Finally, after years of being frozen, council remuneration will increase by 1.75 per cent in 2015, in line with union contract settlements.

On the social affairs front, five new units will be added to Bancroft's social housing. And Council endorsed the need enunciated by Sarah Krieger of Community Care North Hastings for more awareness of how a community can cope with the growing incidence of Alzheimer's and related dementia, as the number of seniors keeps increasing, and as caregivers are stretched to the limit.

Krieger asked for the Alzheimer's Society to be included in discussions about creating a more "age-friendly" community. Council supported an application for a planning grant, given the extent to which present social agencies are stretched in ensuring a proper quality of independent living for area seniors in need.