

Farmers' market up in the air for 2015

By Tony Pearson

With the Bancroft Business Improvement Association withdrawing their involvement in Bancroft's Farmers' Market, a group of vendors wants to meet with the municipality to determine whether the market can be operated in 2015, and if so, where. According to Mary Kavanagh, the BBIA "doesn't have the energy" to oversee the market and ensure conformity with appropriate legislation, given its involvement with other activities, especially Wheels/Water/Wings. Also off the table is the suggested move of the market to the McCaskie parking lot. Local market participant Irvin Weber reported that a committee of vendors was looking to discuss the use of Millennium Park with the Town, as it is child-and pet-friendly.

The BIA also sent in its budget to the town. Wheels/Water/Wings is expected to cost around \$28,000, offset by around \$13,000 of events revenue. The downtown design project is expected to cost around \$30,000, offset by around \$16,000 in grants. Overall, BIA expenses will run about \$110,000. Most of its revenue to meet these expenses will come from the levy on its members (\$63,000), supplemented by event revenue and reserve funds.

Another beautification project with a more material outcome was outlined to council by "Harvest the North". This partnership of North Hastings agencies, including the Community Cupboard, Youth in Action, and the Community Trust, is hoping and planning to set up and maintain ten raised gardens in Riverside Park this summer. The concept is that these gardens will not only improve the appearance and attractiveness of the area "especially since they will display the work of area artists among the plantings" but will also serve to educate the public about both the use of local produce, and the importance of sustainability. As well, what is grown in the gardens will contribute to regional food security. A key tie-in is with the youth food skills training program which will operate out of the new BCT park building; canning and preserving are on the curriculum. Council agreed to enter into the partnership agreement.

At its meeting, council heard about initiatives by health organizations to improve care and cut health care expenses. John O'Donnell, acting chief of Quinte-Hastings Paramedic Service, presented figures on ambulance use which showed that the service received about 29,000 calls a year, including nearly four thousand from the Bancroft area. He noted that the Emergency service planned to increase its access to all parts of the county through the use of All Terrain Vehicles, and they were also looking at a Renfrew County pilot project using drone aircraft to deliver emergency equipment like defibrillators. O'Donnell observed that careful planning of ambulance deployment had substantially cut back the number of kilometres driven in off-hours, especially at night: an important factor in reducing the need for more ambulances, which can cost three quarters of a million dollars each.

But potentially the largest impact on individual health service will come from a community paramedic service, currently in operation in a number of counties. This has paramedics doing surveillance visits to people with vulnerable conditions "the frail, the elderly, chronic disease sufferers" in order to ensure that their care is pro-active, and doesn't trigger an excessive number of emergency room visits.

Another health cost saving measure was outlined by Cathy Pearson, executive director of the North Hastings Family Health Team. She described the development of the "System Navigator" by area health agencies working in a "Health Link" partnership. The navigator works with those individuals who use the health system the most, developing a plan with them to reduce their need for hospitalization and emergency room treatment. In a year, this group's ER use was down 87%, their hospital re-admission rate had declined by 83%, and the length of their hospital stays went down by 71 per cent. In all, the estimate is that nearly three million dollars in savings was achieved in the area's health system.

Pearson noted that the North Hastings FHT's visiting specialist program, which saw about 2,500 visits last year, had saved local clients half a million kilometres of travel. The specialist clinics include cardiology, respiratory, urology and general surgery. Clients also save travel to urban areas through the use of "OTN" "the Ontario Telemedicine Network" which allows consultations with distant specialists, and access to sophisticated diagnostic equipment. She noted that access to OTN and visiting specialists is open to everyone in North Hastings, not just NHFHT enrolled clients. Wellness promotion programs like nutrition, fitness, and smoking cessation, and "Living Well" programs like diabetes education and management, add to cost prevention.

In other business, Councillor Barry McGibbon wanted to know if the agreement concluded with the Rally of the Tall Pines covered the costs of road damage, including to forest-access roads. Public works manager Perry Kelly and Rally reps will consult further with McGibbon on the specifics. Council also named McGibbon to the committee to work out Rally issues, such as local business involvement.

Deputy Mayor Paul Jenkins raised the question of how much work to put on Pinnacle Road, other than calcium treatment, if the road

has a ?limited future?. Kelly will report on this to the next Committee of the Whole. Meanwhile, he outlined dust suppression efforts planned, including watering if problems arise before calcium applications.

Finally, Councillor Tracy McGibbon, event coordinator, confirmed that Canada Day fireworks will be set off from the Station Street bridge.