

Town of Bancroft CAO takes on county role

By Tony Pearson

Outgoing Hastings County Warden Rick Phillips was in Bancroft last week to discuss county issues with the town's chief administrative officer (CAO) Hazel Lambe. Lambe has just assumed the position of chair of the Hastings Clerks and Treasurers Association.

Lambe explained that the county clerks meet monthly to discuss current challenges and opportunities in municipal government in this region. Lambe gave as her main goal for the year ahead the strengthening of the link between the county and its towns. In particular, she hoped that municipalities will make increasing use of county services and resources ? for example, in obtaining and sharing information on infrastructure financing. This is of course an issue of great local concern, given the growing deficit on the operation of the sewer system.

Lambe and Phillips were keen to point out that the county had worked and is working to help towns in a number of areas, such as information technology. Although conceding that more work is needed to bring full high-speed Internet service to all the homes and businesses in the county, Phillips pointed out that it was the county who had pushed the federal government to fund the Eastern Ontario Regional Network (EORN) to start the process.

Another area where the county may be able to assist townships is the area of purchasing supplies. ?Common procurement? refers to several municipalities going together to buy materials in quantities large enough to get savings on the sale price. This can be done with a bulk commodity like sand or salt, or with technical items like computers. So far, Lambe reported, there was no common purchasing policy, but she was hopeful of a breakthrough in the near future. She noted that already, towns could ?hook onto? to the county package for extended health benefits for their employees.

In other areas, the theme is more competition than co-operation between municipalities? for example, economic development initiatives. However, Phillips stated that the county had launched an ?economic action development plan? for the entire region, identifying strengths and opportunities; municipalities have been invited to participate in the construction of a framework.

Phillips noted that the county also assists specific towns with identified projects, like Bancroft's proposed Earth Sciences Centre. As well, the county's official plan, prepared with town input, will be out this coming summer, to assist all townships in planning for growth within provincial guidelines.

Lambe and Phillips also wanted to draw attention to the many county programs that impact Bancroft, such as Centennial Manor, Woodview public housing, North Hastings Children's Services day care and after-school, the local court, 911, Paramedics, Ontario Works, trails development, and physician recruitment.

?I'm proud to play a part in the county's planning and programming,? Lambe said. ?In the next year, we hope to connect even more people with the resources they require.?