

Champions needed for earth sciences project

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By Chris Drost

It will be three years in May 2019 since the Museum Planning Partner's Earth Sciences Centre for the Town of Bancroft Final Master Plan Report was published and presented at a public meeting in L'Amable. Since that time, there has been little noticeable action in moving forward with the project, or any version of it.

Andrew Redden, economic development and tourism manager for the County of Hastings reports that the project is not forgotten, and further action has been initiated this year. He presented the project at an Ontario East Economic Development Dragon's Den-style event earlier this year. Redden used it as an opportunity to pitch the idea to potential investors. Unfortunately, no one stepped forward.

Redden approached the Town of Bancroft and suggested they get a group of stakeholders together to see if a formal incorporated not-for-profit board could be established. A representative from Museum Planning Partners, Robert Barnett, chaired the meeting on Oct. 11. It included representatives from several community organizations and individuals with an interest in recreational geology including, Mary Lynn Rutledge from Community Futures, Chief Stephen Hunter from the Kijicho Manito Madaouskarini Algonquin Nation, representatives from the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines, geologist Chris Fouts, Bancroft's Mayor Paul Jenkins, town staff and others. There was "considerable excitement about moving forward," according to Redden.

This group met again on Nov. 28, a meeting chaired by Redden. The focus of the meeting was on how to best set up a formal group and next steps. The consensus among the group was that the recreational geology "product" should be improved as a first step, as opposed to focusing on the actual building of the Earth Sciences Centre. This decision came about as several questions came up at the meeting: "What recreational geology assets do we actually have?" "Who do we have that could conduct recreational geology tours?" "What sites can they go to now?" "What sites have been lost or are in need of refurbishment?"

While not losing sight of the bigger picture for an earth sciences centre, the group agreed that they need to take a closer look at reports that are available about mineral collecting sites that currently exist, to ask the Bancroft Gem and Mineral Museum what help they could use to improve what they offer and to determine what actual work needs to take place at mineral collecting sites to make them tourism ready. There was also discussion about starting a prospector course as perhaps a first step in their efforts to build up the recreational geology tourism product.

Mayor Paul Jenkins said, "the initial focus on the high price tag included in the consultant's report, something many believe is unattainable, has actually hurt us. We need to be realistic and forge ahead with all the natural assets we have."

"The project also needs to be regional, everything needs to be regional," Jenkins added.

In terms of formalizing the group into a charitable not-for-profit organization that could drive the project forward and seek funds from various levels of government, organizations, corporations and others, there was agreement that this group needs to include community champions.

"The project needs community champions to be successful," Redden reiterated.

In the interim, Redden is reaching out to a couple of existing community not-for-profit organizations that already have structure, to determine their interest in hosting this ad hoc group as a sub-committee for the time being.

Redden says, "we need people who are willing to start making calls to levels of government and contacting universities, people who are enthusiastic about the bigger picture and want to help make it happen."

Redden encourages anyone who has skills to offer and would like to see this project come to fruition to contact him at reddena@hastingscounty.com or 613-966-6712 ext. 4011.