

North sewer stirs discussion at Bancroft town hall

By Tony Pearson

Dungannon residents filled the Rec Centre last week for a chance to listen to and question the Bancroft town council and top officials. They heard results from the 100 surveys returned to date (70 from tax bills, 30 on-line) which indicated that local topics of greatest interest are taxes, roads, and other infrastructure concerns. Then they discussed these concerns, particularly the proposed extension of the town sewer system to the north of town.

Before the discussion, CAO Hazel Lambe outlined recent town accomplishments such as reducing policing charges, implementing a new records management system, and installing more energy-efficient streetlights. She gave the township goals as economic growth, debt reduction, population retention (especially youth), and the development of Bancroft into a business and service 'hub' for the region.

The road to economic development later created the one instance of debate during the meeting, when several people questioned spending town money to push the sewer system on to what is now 'vacant land?'. Lambe stated that almost all expressions of interest in investment concern the north of town. Barry Wannamaker, a former township staff member, said that if 'big-box' stores want to build there, they should be willing to pay for the sewer extension themselves. Councillor Mark Kavanagh noted that there were major businesses such as Foodland and Canadian Tire who are not now on the sewer line but want to be; she suggested they might help.

The question of 'in-filling' was raised. The question was raised if the township's goal was still to build up the downtown core. Deputy Mayor Paul Jenkins suggested that if the north end of town was fully developed, then new investors drawn to an expanding town would then fill in currently vacant downtown stores. Wannamaker later challenged the 'If you build it, they will come?' outlook by asking if any small Ontario town which had attempted to develop industrial or commercial parks on vacant land had ever seen commensurate development; it was his belief that none had.

The cost of existing wastewater treatment was also raised. Deputy Mayor Jenkins stated that one answer to the current deficit was an increase in users 'i.e., more development' given that the system already had the capacity to process a greater volume. He also noted that part of the problem was determining the source of water and wastewater entering the system now, as the town was receiving fee revenue from only one third of the water treated. 'If we got paid for two-thirds of the water we treat, we'd break even,' he asserted. CAO Lambe said that although a metering problem was suspected, this did not turn out to be the source of the problem; further study would be carried out, possibly involving taking video within the lines themselves.

Another question involved repairs to Quarry Road, with one resident (Joseph Marcie) stating that the dust from excessive traffic was so bad for his COPD that he had to remain constantly in his house with the windows closed. Mayor Bernice Jenkins replied that while there were no plans to pave the road, it would receive two tar-&-chip treatments this summer. She also promised to raise the question of greater police monitoring and more signage to discourage speeding. A suggestion about bridge limitation as a capital savings measure drew interest from councillors. It was observed that since the Station Street bridge is wholly town-owned (and not part of the connecting link), putting on a weight limit to restrict its use by heavy trucks should prolong its life. The mayor and CAO pledged to look closely at the idea.

After the open session, Council then turned back to the 2015 town budget. Treasurer Craig Davidson explained to the public that the 2014 budget had addressed only core needs, with the major capital project (the Bridge Street bridge renovation) carried out with funding from other levels of government. Thus the town had an operating surplus of \$80,000. He identified the goals of the 2015 budget as tax stability and debt reduction, while using policing cost reductions to improve road maintenance 'thus delivering another balanced budget. And again, he advocated the one percent tax increase to rebuild funds for future capital improvements. The budget with the one percent increase for capital projects passed unanimously. Afterward, asked for comment on the first town-hall of the new council, Mayor Jenkins stated: 'It is gratifying to see residents showing interest. Participation by way of questions and comments help council and staff to make decisions that affect us all. I believe the meeting was a positive experience overall and I am already looking forward to the fall Town Hall Meeting at Club 580.'