

Ad Hoc committee discusses advisory committee



By Bill Kilpatrick

The Bancroft North Hastings Community Centre Ad Hoc Committee met on Nov. 7 and passed a resolution recommending to council that the Town of Bancroft staff create a new advisory committee/board. Staff are to subsequently also create terms of reference for the new board that is being created to assist with event organization and revenue generation for the North Hastings Community Centre. This committee/ board would be made up of community users, a member or members of Bancroft council as well as Town of Bancroft staff members and possibly other municipal representatives as well. While it was not exactly clear how the committee will function, as those specifics will be outlined in the future terms of reference, the members of the ad hoc committee spoke at great length about what purpose they would like the new committee to serve, and staff clarified some of things that the committee would not be able to do. Councillor Valerie Miles' vision for the committee involved a collective approach. She said that she would like to "Have an advisory committee that has to do with voices in town, sponsors maybe, somebody appointed by council, somebody appointed by each of the user groups. We're going to have seven or eight people sitting around that table whose focus is the health of the community centre. What is the best way for us to continue to be open?" Miles spoke about the possibility of users stepping forward to run revenue generating events like pickleball or run dances, adding that, "At this point I don't think that we have a lot of other voices within the community working towards that piece because there's an expectation that we [Town of Bancroft staff] should do all of that." Miles spoke about the importance of having the users of the community centre be at the forefront of revenue generation and event planning to "enhance the experience for the users." She then stated, "It would be great to get the municipalities to the table, but the next step is: how do we bring the users to the table and how do they work with us to make sure that the arena stays open." Board chair Wayne Wiggins' vision for the proposed advisory committee/board was similar to Miles' in many respects. Wiggins stated, "What I'm hoping is that we can agree to have an advisory board set up to work with the town staff to manage the arena going forward? The [revenue generating] tool as I see it is an advisory board to work with the town to bring in events? and maybe they [the user groups] would be willing to run it." However, Wiggins was clear that any and all suggestions, regarding operations would have to be approved by either the town manager Andra Kauffeldt, or the arena manager Pat Hoover, pointing out that "that decision making has to fall with the town managers?" When Wiggins asked Miles and councillor George Eastman if they thought an advisory committee was the way to go, Eastman responded that he was "not sure if an advisory committee is the total way to go?" and he enquired about what kind of decision-making power the committee would have. Wiggins responded unequivocally that they would not be responsible for making operational decisions stating, "They're not going to have a lot [of decision making power] they're not going to make any hiring or firing decisions, [or decisions to] reduce ice time?" Eastman enquired as to how the user groups were going to create revenue for the arena. Wiggins responded, "I don't know. That's why we need a committee to talk about it." However, Kauffeldt was clear about how the advisory committee could not generate revenue. "We

have received a number of suggestions from folks about things that we can do to generate revenue for the arena. [People have suggested that] we could hold 50/50 draws, we could hold raffles, we could have lotteries of sort and our answer to that is always no. It's not because we don't want to do those things it's because the town is prohibited from participating in anything that's considered a game of chance. So, we can't hold a lottery, we can't have a 50/50 draw, we can't do a raffle for prizes, we can't do 'chase the ace.' They are all games of chance and we cannot have a lottery license. Kauffeldt further explained that this rule also extended to any committees of council, 'It's the same reason we can't do our own fundraising for the library. We have to have a third party do the fundraising and make a capital contribution to the town,' she explained. Kauffeldt further outlined the specific criteria that third party groups have to meet in order to be eligible to fundraise. According to Kauffeldt they must be a 'registered user group that has charitable status or non-profit status and have to be incorporated for a year. You have to have a bank account and provide disclosure of your bank account and the activities of the lottery. It's quite cumbersome. It's not easy?' she said. Eastman then suggested that, instead of forming a new committee the town should hire an events coordinator/ revenue generating person who would be able to fulfil those tasks so that it would not fall onto current staff, who all around the table agreed were already overstretched. Wiggins suggested that Eastman bring that idea to council to be considered for the next budget. Eastman responded in frustration that, 'they're not going to be hired until next fall.' Wiggins agreed stating, 'That's the frustrating thing about working in a municipality, things can't just happen over night. If it was private run like the former arena commission you could say, 'Do it and hire them tomorrow,' but that can't possibly happen today. '[Plus] we don't have the money to hire a body to do that. We all know it should be there, but we don't have the money to hire that person.' For Miles one of the big issues that needed to be overcome is for people to not view the current issues with the community centre through the historic lens of the arena commission. This gave way to the following exchange between Miles and Eastman: Miles: 'We're used to the old model [used by the Arena Commission]. That's the other thing.' Eastman: 'I know, but the model worked.' Miles: 'George! We were broke!' Miles: 'The model worked 30 years ago. It sort-of worked 20 years ago. It stopped working 10 years ago. We hung on by our nails for a long time.' While Miles encouraged those in attendance to focus on the present issues facing the community centre, she also recognized that it was time for something new and untested, and that, regardless of the risks, doing nothing was in fact worse. 'I think one of the approaches that works with all of us is setting up this [advisory committee]. It's new. I don't even know if it will work. It might not work? I just know that we are in a position where we need to try something different. We need to try something new, and we can't go backwards. We can't control the operation of the arena, that's now in the hands of the Town of Bancroft, and all those pieces are in place, they're not going to change. If we build a coalition around this community centre it will bring more than just our thoughts to the table.' Until the advisory committee is formed and functional it remains to be seen what exactly it will bring to the table. Council still needs to approve the creation of the committee, the terms of reference still need to be completed, and members need to be recruited and their thoughts and ideas still have to be converted into actionable items. All the while the ever-growing deficit hangs over the arena, the town, and the users like the sword of Damocles.