

Bancroft boardwalk concerns

We have three major concerns about the boardwalk project along the York River relating to: purpose, safety, and responsible citizenship.

The boardwalk's main purpose is said to be 'a catalyst for downtown development,' to revitalize Bancroft's downtown area by bringing in more tourists and to stimulate the opening of more businesses. Since the completion of a continuous walkway would actually bypass the main street, it is difficult to imagine how it would help the main street businesses. Investing money in a project that goes behind the back of main street businesses does not address the revitalization of the main street. Where is the data to support the influx of tourists suggested by the boardwalk promoters? The reports for the original Building Bancroft Project (a source of inspiration for the boardwalk project) contain charts and figures based on projections and extrapolations, creating a glowing sales pitch that was not based on reality. Thankfully, that project was finally rejected by Bancroft. It should also be noted that in Gravenhurst, where the town is on four lane Highway 11 and is a gateway to the Muskoka Lakes, there are still a number of empty businesses for rent or sale along that boardwalk. The Muskoka Wharf boardwalk passes in front of the businesses, not behind them. It would be interesting to know if their walkway has really helped the downtown businesses in Gravenhurst.

Current thinking supports the movement to increase the naturalization of shorelines. If another purpose of the Bancroft boardwalk is to enhance the beauty of the York River shoreline, why would the community want to add more artificial structures with concrete piers and metal railings along the shoreline? The old stone walls along the York River blend in without detracting. Future plans to add lighting, more docks, and commercial activity would not enhance the natural beauty.

Far from being denied access to experience the York River, residents and visitors already have three wonderful parks in Bancroft that offer different river experiences with expansive natural shoreline access. The sidewalks on the bridges also offer great views of the York River.

A second concern relates to safety. As the boardwalk now exists there are steep banks to the river above a power producing dam. Are the open railings safe, especially for children? In Gravenhurst, where the walkway is wider, there are proper railings with small openings on the few bridges where water is crossed.

There is also proper signage to warn of slippery conditions when the walkway is wet. Our other safety concerns for the boardwalk relate to snow and garbage removal, personal and property security, policing, liability, and maintenance.

How do you stop motor bikes, skateboards, ATVs, and snowmachines from using the boardwalk? The current sections of the boardwalk on both sides of the Bridge Street bridge already have many weeds growing up on the banks. Who is responsible? Will the Town of Bancroft assume responsibility for the care and maintenance of the boardwalk?

Our third area of concern relates to responsible citizenship. First of all, the relentless harassment of the individual property owners who do not want the walkway to cross their waterfront property is appalling. When the owners have said 'no' it means 'NO'! It is wrong to expect these owners to continue to provide reasons. Why does the Boardwalk Committee 'remain in communication' with the property owners who wish to keep their waterfront land for their own use? Why would Bancroft council even consider sending more letters to these owners? If the boardwalk is deteriorating, as one council member has suggested, it is certainly not the responsibility of those property owners.

A committee member has said that he envisions the walkway extending all the way from Vance Farm Park (bridge across Highway 62, perhaps?) to The Eagles Nest. Home owners along the route: your property could be next! It is great to have dreams and plan projects to build but please don't assume you can just take over other people's property. Would any of the Boardwalk Committee members or their supporters volunteer to open their own cottage or residential waterfront properties for public use? Also, how would these next phases of the boardwalk

Finally, we have to ask, how did the Boardwalk Committee receive a \$88,000. Trillium Grant for a project for which they had not

secured permission from all of the landowners who would be affected? The Boardwalk Committee has stated that the project has not cost Bancroft any tax money so far. What really reflects poorly on the town's revitalization efforts? is that the Boardwalk Project was allowed to go ahead in the first place. Bancroft has so many areas where money is needed that it seems irresponsible to spend \$280,000. on this project. It will also cost money to add safety features, such as improved railings and signage, to the existing part of the walkway. There will be ongoing expenses to provide security, to do routine repairs and maintenance, and to provide for regular safety.

The money donated by businesses and others could have been used to improve the storefronts and facades downtown to increase their curb appeal (as one example of many alternatives). We spend time and money in Bancroft. We enjoy the downtown shops and restaurants along the main street. We want Bancroft to prosper and grow in a fiscally and environmentally responsible way that is welcoming to visitors and respects the property rights of its citizens.

Tom and Mary Robinson