

Bancroft council assesses local grants

By Tony Pearson

Bancroft council's committee of the whole took a look last week at the grants it traditionally gives to community organizations. Most of these are small and were given readily ? for example, \$300 to the North Hastings Music Festival, \$200 for an award to a North Hastings high school student, \$200 for a week of public skating at the arena.

However, when it came to some of the larger grants, brakes were applied. Last year, the Bancroft Chamber of Commerce received \$15,000 plus utility costs for its role in tourism development. But this year's request for \$20,000 was turned down flat in its entirety. Even more interesting was the approach taken to a contribution for the TROUT public transit system. Last year, Bancroft contributed \$7,000. However, Mayor Bernice Jenkins suggested that since any level of town donation would allow the allotment of gas tax rebate funds, Bancroft could reduce its own contribution considerably ? say, to \$700. With recent rejections of TROUT contributions by Hastings Highlands and Wollaston, this could squeeze the transit system to a point where severely reduced service became necessary. Council sent the request back for further study. Also sent for more study was a request from the Art Gallery of Bancroft (\$5,000 to expand their public art education programs).

Council did authorize another year of providing the use of Millennium Park and Club 580 to the summer camp run by North Hastings Children's Services. However concern was expressed at the fact that half of the campers are from outside Bancroft. The feeling was that in future, other townships should make a financial contribution on behalf of their young people. The issue could be forced if Bancroft billed Children's Service \$5,000 for non-resident use.

Two grants which were approved as requested were to Wheels/Water/Wings (\$3,000 cash and \$10,500 in services), and to the Rally of the Tall Pines (\$5,000 cash and \$7,500 in services)

An inquiry about town sponsorship of the upcoming Saw-Tech logging show (at a cost of between \$3,500 and \$7,000) was met with a decision to buy an exhibition table for a fee of \$1,800.

Council also received a request from the Curling Club for \$2,500 to buy pickleball equipment. Pickleball is a new sport aimed primarily at seniors; it is played on a badminton-sized court with a whiffle-ball. Pickleball has caught on in American retirement communities, and is now spreading to local towns such as Coe Hill and Wilberforce. The curling club hopes the activity will help its precarious financial situation, since the number of curlers has dropped, and major capital costs are looming. Council sent the request into the budget process.

The committee of the whole then had another look at the town's draft budget. As reported several months ago in Bancroft This Week, the plan is to again have a one per cent increase in the tax rate to build up the capital expenditure reserves, plus a one per cent increase to cover rising operating costs ? total two per cent (in addition to a revenue increase of 1.5 per cent from increased assessment levels).

The current proposed budget would see the largest amount of increased spending in waste management (about \$100,000 more than last year). There's also a large percentage increase in the recreation budget (13 per cent). On the other hand, policing charges continue to decline, but by only \$25,000.

Treasurer Craig Davidson again noted that this budget does not address the continuing annual \$400,000 deficit in the sewer account, for which a solution must be found quickly if the town is not to face a serious cash flow problem.

On the positive side, the town's cash reserves continued to grow last year, with \$400,000 added. Interest payments on the town debt are also dropping.

However, Davidson warned that some major capital expenditures are looming, for equipment like a garbage packer and new trucks and plows.

As for this year's capital budget, the main items are sewer inspection equipment (\$50,000), fire department equipment (\$100,000), furnace replacement (about \$50,000), and museum repairs (\$10,000). The capital budget also contains about \$155,000 for road construction, although this is a very small portion of the total road reconstruction work identified as needed.

In addition, council is proceeding with repairs to the library's doors and windows. Half of the estimated cost of approximately \$40,000 will be provided by the federal government's Canada 150 infrastructure program, with the other \$20,000 coming from the town's capital budget.

Work on the budget will continue.