

Bancroft council considers changes to Bag Tag Program

By Nate Smelle

At the April 8 council meeting, Bancroft's general manager, Andra Kauffeldt, presented a report recommending significant changes to the town's waste management strategy through the implementation of a garbage bag tag program. The proposal comes after a review revealed that the town's current system, in place since 2010, is no longer financially sustainable.

Over the last couple of months since Kauffeldt first brought this proposal forward, she said staff have been working on a bag tag policy, as well as a bylaw to support the implementation of bag tags. Noting that they have come up with a preliminary approval in principle of the policy in the report, she said they are now seeking council's clarification regarding two items. One of those, Kauffeldt said, was regarding the provision of free tags and how that would be managed.

Reminding council that staff's proposal recommends that the town doesn't offer free tags, she acknowledged, "It is extremely difficult to manage that to make sure that tags are where they're supposed to be, so we're proposing that there be no free tags."

The other issue they are seeking council's guidance on, Kauffeldt said, was in regard to a proposal of how residents would be able to access tags. Explaining that they would be available for purchase at the town office during regular business hours she said the tags would also be available for purchase through debit and credit at the waste site.

"So, if folks took their waste there [to the waste site] they could purchase a strip of tags through debit or credit only and use them to dispose of their waste at that time," Kauffeldt said. "And, we are also exploring the possibility of identifying two or three key frequent shopping areas like a grocery store, or home hardware, or Canadian Tire that have extended hours that may be able to offer that service to folks in a different environment if they aren't able to come to the office during business hours to pick those up."

Fifteen years ago, Bancroft introduced a user-pay system for industrial, commercial, and institutional waste services. Under the 2010 policy, ICI users including schools, churches, county buildings, and service clubs received 52 free tags annually, with additional tags costing \$1.50 for curbside pickup and \$0.90 if brought directly to the waste site. Notably, those rates have remained unchanged ever since.

However, a new analysis by town staff shows Bancroft's fees are now significantly out of step with both regional and similarly-sized municipalities. While surrounding smaller towns average \$1.50 per tag, comparable towns are charging approximately \$3.25. Meanwhile, the cost of operating Bancroft's waste site has soared to more than \$800,000 a year, covering expenses such as garbage truck operation, wages, waste processing, reporting, and safety measures.

"Unfortunately with the loss of revenue to our waste site as a result of changes to the recycling program, we either need to tax to recover that revenue that helps to offset those operational expenses; or we need to find a new revenue source," explained Kauffeldt.

Although waste management is typically not a revenue-generating service, Kauffeldt stressed that Bancroft is missing an opportunity to recover some costs through updated bag tag fees. She also pointed out that the town is not legally required to charge for waste disposal but stressed that failing to adjust the system places increasing pressure on the municipal budget.

"We're one of very few municipalities that still did not have bag tag fees; and the bag tag fees that we did have are extremely low in relation to most other municipalities that do have them," Kauffeldt told council. "So this seemed like a way that we could cover that expense, or help to recover some of that expense while still allowing ratepayers some control over how much that expense affects them or not based on their recycling and waste diversion habits."

In addition to financial considerations, Kauffeldt highlighted several operational issues that need to be addressed. These include updating the bylaw to better manage the program, setting clear rules for different types of users, and establishing appropriate

exceptions for residents who may use the service differently.

Financial projections show that even a modest fee adjustment could have a significant impact. If each permanent resident tagged just one bag of waste per week at \$1 per tag, the town could see an additional \$210,000 in annual revenue. Furthermore, introducing fees for residential waste could encourage more residents to reduce their waste output by composting or recycling, extending the life of the town's waste site and minimizing future costs for transferring waste elsewhere.

The environmental and community benefits of the proposed changes were also noted in the report. For instance, it states that incentivizing waste reduction and promoting recycling, Bancroft could see positive effects on climate change initiatives. Additionally, better-managed waste disposal contributes to overall community safety and well-being by encouraging residents to be more mindful of how they handle their waste.

Kauffeldt's report recommended a phased implementation of the new fees. Under the proposed plan, residential bag tags would start at \$1 each, increasing by 50 cents annually until reaching \$2.50 by 2028. ICI tags would begin at \$2, similarly rising by 50-cent increments each year to reach \$3.50 in 2028.

Following Kauffeldt's presentation of the report, council discussed some of the specifics pertaining to the proposed changes. Upon thanking Kauffeldt for her presentation, Councillor Charles Mullet asked how the proposed changes would impact residents living in apartment buildings. Indicating that all residents will need to tag their garbage bags, Kauffeldt said it will be up to the landlord of an apartment building to decide whether they purchase tags for their tenants, or if the tenant would be responsible for tagging their own waste.

Both Deputy Mayor Wiggins and Councillor Kevin Lawrence requested more information regarding the cost of implementing the changes, as well as how much revenue would be generated. While Kauffeldt could not provide a precise number at this time, she said, it's reasonable to assume that the town would bring in approximately \$30,000.

Council is expected to further discuss the details of the proposal, including management and enforcement mechanisms, before moving ahead with the changes. If approved, the new structure could help Bancroft tackle its growing waste management costs while promoting more sustainable waste practices across the community.