

Bancroft council faces new costs

By Tony Pearson

Bancroft council took place last week without a familiar face. As previously reported in *Bancroft This Week*, Mayor Bernice Jenkins is taking an indeterminate leave of absence. Paul Jenkins has become the acting mayor.

In his opening remarks, he urged the mayor to take all the time away she needed to regain her strength. He cited inclusivity as his priority principle for the months ahead ? getting as many people involved as possible ? as well as full and open communication among council members, staff and the community.

Town considers better ways to get the word out

Communication strategies were also on the mind of CAO Hazel Lambe. She drew attention to social media as a potential alternative to getting out the town's information. At the same time, she noted that the interactive nature of information sources such as Facebook could lead to negative posts and false facts taking over. Councillor Mary Kavanagh pointed out that on the other hand, the town's current website was inadequate as an information vehicle.

The consensus was that residents need a place where they can find out what's been doing and what's due to be done, along with the background and reasoning. Lambe noted that the town's record management system needs an overhaul before it can serve as a reliable guide to, for example, the town indebtedness. She stated that staff are working on a public survey, to assist in the development of a comprehensive information strategy.

Municipal assessment costs town

Council learned that Canadian Tire's appeal of its municipal assessment had been settled. The town will have to pay back more \$100,000. Lambe will be joining MPAC's Municipal Liaison Group to examine problems such as this, and try to develop coping strategies.

Water and sewage contract proposals due April 19

An initiative to reduce the town's sewage bills came to naught. Ontario Clean Water Agency was asked to make good on its expressed opinion that its contract could be reduced by \$100,000 a year. But the agency replied that this reduction would only be given if the town renewed its management contract with them. Instead, the town is pressing ahead with its request for proposals to manage the system after the OCWA contract expires in December; submissions were due April 19.

Further to the sewage problem, Councillor Tracy McGibbon asked for a press release to be issued reviewing the facts behind the increase, as she was suffering personal attacks on social media. Acting Mayor Jenkins stated that the ?core? working advisory group will be reconvened to determine how things stand following the rate increase and further research, and will also look at a communication plan.

Lambe noted that new manhole covers appeared to be reducing the infiltration of outside water into the sewers. However, camera imaging on the system remains essential. Despite a federal guarantee that the money for this will be available, the town has still not received approval of its grant.

Council recommends collaboration for Club 580 plan

The request by the Bancroft library to move into Club 580 has brought some push-back from members of the existing seniors club, who feel they aren't being consulted. They also had issues about lack of proper upkeep of the building.

Staff reports that the building now costs the town a net \$21,500 a year to maintain. The building also needs a new furnace, which would be costly.

Meanwhile, library CEO Chris Stephenson feels that both the library and the seniors club could use the building; he has also stated that the library would be willing to manage the building. In the end, council consensus was that a collaborative plan should be developed among all three partners.

Bancroft election will not have online voting

On a split vote, council decided against taking the plunge into online and telephone voting in the next municipal election, despite other area towns opting for this new method. Although McGibbon felt the switch might increase voter turnout and Lambe noted that this method would be cheaper than the current system, Kavanagh and Jenkins were worried about the existing weakness of Internet service in Bancroft. Concerns were also expressed about seniors' unfamiliarity with the technology.

Surplus properties put up for sale

In an effort to raise needed revenue, council decided to declare 10 of its properties surplus and list them for sale. Whether the properties would sell, and how quickly they might sell, is not predictable. The properties include the present town office building and the parking lot at Flint and Hastings. The dog park is also on the list, but council promised to consult with the people who

established and maintain it before any final decision is made.

Budget meeting set

Interim treasurer Arthur Smith reported that he will have the budget ready for the next meeting of council. He noted that the county needs to know the new tax rates by May 12. Council decided that following discussion at their April 25 meeting, they will hold a public meeting on the evening of May 9 to allow ratepayer input. The final vote will take place the following day.

A decision to hire an assistant for the CAO and the works manager was deferred.