

Bancroft council pushes for more provincial funding

By Tony Pearson

The Bancroft town council didn't withdraw from the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) ? but it plans to send AMO a strong letter indicating its displeasure at the role which the organization took in negotiations for a new police costs formula.

Councillor Paul Jenkins expressed his anger at last week's council meeting when he presented a resolution to terminate the town's AMO membership.

He said that not only did AMO fight against a formula that would have been to Bancroft's advantage, but having won a new less favourable deal, AMO then further arranged a five-year phase-in to the new costings.

?We've been disadvantaged for the past 15 years, and now we have to wait five years before we're paying the lower amount we should have paying all this time,? he said.

Jenkins estimated that the phase-in will cost the township \$2 million over that time period.

?We'll lose over half a million dollars next year. Is that fair??

The rest of Council didn't want to pull out of the organization just yet. Mayor Bernice Jenkins said that the organization did a good job keeping municipalities abreast of provincial developments, and of analysing provincial legislation and its impact on municipalities; it also provided a channel to provincial ministers and senior officials. Deputy Mayor Wayne Wiggins agreed that AMO didn't represent Bancroft well in the OPP cost negotiation, but noted that if a child misbehaves, the parents don't kick him out of the house.

In the end, the termination motion was tabled ? in effect, left suspended. Meanwhile, council agreed to send a letter to AMO, with copies to other townships, asking for better representation.

Council will also be letting its fellow townships know that change is needed to the system for maintaining provincial highways when they pass through towns. Basically, they want the province to restore funding for the maintenance and repair of Hwy. 62 and Hwy. 28 as they pass through Bancroft. The resolution reports that over five and a half million vehicles use these routes every year, meaning that town taxpayers are subsidizing an enormous amount of provincial through traffic. The resolution will be sent to other Ontario municipalities and to AMO for endorsement and support.

Council also re-addressed a potential expense time-bomb, in the form of the municipal landfill. Currently assessed at about \$500,000, the landfill valuation means that the town of Bancroft pays around \$1,500 to the county and \$4,500 to school boards ? which, the mayor states, is double taxation, as ratepayers already pay their own shares. In addition, MPAC, the provincial property assessment agency, has recently tried to increase this valuation significantly, and could do so again- which would drive taxes much higher, and restrict what could be spent on municipal projects and services. Accordingly, Bancroft wants the province to exempt municipal landfills from assessment and taxation completely, as other municipal property is exempt. And again, Bancroft will call on other towns and on AMO for endorsement and support.

Council also heard from Hastings Shores Children's Aid about increasing awareness of child abuse, as October is Child Abuse Awareness Month in Ontario.

In addition, Andrew Redden outlined the Hastings County Economic Development Action Plan for 2014-18. Its key goals are to support local agriculture and forestry sectors, to continue to push the ?Communities with Opportunities? branding of Hastings County towns, to encourage the coaching of aspiring new entrepreneurs by current business managers, and to back attractive new projects like Bancroft's Earth Sciences Centre.