

Bancroft council seeks more federal and provincial funding

By Tony Pearson

Financial matters remained front and centre at last week's meeting of Bancroft council. To their satisfaction, they learned that the province had approved their application for the replacement of the Snow Road water line from Hastings to the treatment plant. The province will assume 90 per cent of the cost of the \$2 million project, leaving the town to come up with \$200,000 (plus the cost of any overruns, should they occur).

The town then took up another funding issue with the province, when a letter from a neighbouring township requesting support for a road repair triggered a resolution asking for wide-spread and substantially increased provincial assistance for infrastructure repair in small rural municipalities.

Hastings Highlands wants the stretch of Highway 62 from Maynooth to Combermere, used by thousands of vehicles daily ? including many heavy trucks ? fully rehabilitated. The Bancroft resolution added the need for many other infrastructure repairs, including ?Connecting Link? roads, water and sewer lines, waste management sites, and parks. It therefore asks for much more assistance from senior levels of government in meeting these needs.

Frustration was heightened by a report from the county indicating that while 11 of 14 municipalities will see their funds from the provincial partnership fund increase, Bancroft's allotment will remain the same.

When Member of Parliament Mike Bossio popped into the meeting after his inaugural Bancroft monthly office session, he was pressed about the federal government's commitment to smaller municipalities. He reported that his new ?rural caucus? was now close to 70 members, and had already made three presentations to the full national Liberal caucus. One had focused on the importance of a healthy chunk of new infrastructure money flowing to rural towns.

The town also noted a letter from the Ontario Minister of Municipal Affairs to the warden of Hastings County, promising a round of discussions on growth planning in eastern Ontario with wardens, mayors and chief administrative officers.

On the more immediate economic front, council learned of another pressing financial matter when Councillor Charles Mullett reported that major repairs are needed to the local museum in Riverside Park (now re-titled the Bancroft North Hastings Museum), as parts of its timbered walls are rotting out. The town agreed to take over responsibility for budgeting and maintenance, and the museum board is now looking at new fundraising methods.

CAO Hazel Lambe also reported that the town is getting costs for renovations to the entrance to the town office building, to make it more visitor-friendly and less distracting to staff. Mayor Bernice Jenkins wanted this incorporated into an overall plan for the building ? with costs.

Council read a report from the county on improvements in Internet access speed, alleged to allow both upload and download speed of 100 megabits per second. Ironically however, CAO Lambe reported that following a recent visit by Bell to town offices, the speed there actually declined.

In other news, council learned the library has hired a new CEO, Caroline Popadick, now an assistant at the Renfrew Library; she will take up her duties here in a couple of weeks.