

Bancroft council told of gardening success

By Tony Pearson

In the midst of ongoing discussions about tax levels, revenue shortfalls, Internet connectivity problems, and policing costs, a ray of summer sunshine broke through to last week's Bancroft town council meeting. The early change of season came from Jane Kali and Jay Gizuk of the North Hastings Community Trust, who reviewed progress to date and future plans for the 'Harvest the North' community gardens.

These green thumbs were pleased to report that the vegetable beds planted in Riverside Park last spring brought an abundant crop of organic produce, which went to needy families either directly or through the Community Cupboard food bank. In partnership with Bancroft Community Transit (who operate Heart of the Park) and Loyalist College, they also ran a sold-out course in canning your own food.

For 2016, Harvest the North would like to install 10 more vegetable beds at Riverside, as well as new beds in Millennium Park. They have also had discussions with the Chateau seniors apartments about putting beds there, as an recreational activity for residents. In addition, an offer was made to put beds at the township office building.

Kali and Gizuk further reported that they hope to involve local schools and their students in the gardening effort. Public education sessions are also planned; noted community food cultivator Jill Bishop of Peterborough will give a local workshop in February. The declared overall goal was expressed as 'Bancroft feeds itself.'

Council members congratulated the group for their work, and agreed to send a support letter with Harvest's grant application to Toronto-Dominion Bank.

Another community initiative was presented at the meeting: that of County Public Health (represented by Tanya Hill) and the CESCO trail development group (represented by Dave Naulls, Paul D'Aoust, and Peter Whitehead). They are partnered to promote non-motorized recreational use of county trails.

In Bancroft, they work on Vance Park and the Eagle's Nest, but the Bancroft trails committee is working with other municipal and regional groups as well as aboriginal organizations to develop a master plan for county trails, to encourage recreational tourism as well as local fitness. Meanwhile, they hope to see better signage to show the location and routes of trails, and eventually to provide nature information along the trail.

On a different trail issue, Deputy Mayor Paul Jenkins wanted to know why the Eastern Ontario Trails Alliance had refused an offer to install for free a temporary bridge on the Heritage snowmobile/ATV trail by the airport. The town's EOTA rep, Councillor Charles Mullett, replied that the association expected to install a new permanent bridge within a week and a half of receiving a permit from MNR; he stressed that EOTA wanted to make sure that all proper procedures were followed.

With respect to financial matters, council discussed the proposal for setting up a county-wide contract with the OPP for policing services. Councillors were less than enthusiastic about the possibility, as they foresaw such a contract raising their costs again. Mayor Bernice Jenkins and the deputy mayor noted that Bancroft was just beginning to see a reduction in its policing fees after years of over-charges.

In the end, council passed a resolution to request the OPP to reveal the actual costs to municipalities in the event of a county contract. The same resolution called on the county not to impose such a contract on Bancroft.

In other business:

- * CAO Hazel Lambe outlined efforts to get Bell and EORN to bring high-speed Internet to the town offices. Mayor Jenkins stated that the town would have to continue to press EORN to upgrade connectivity in the Bancroft area.
- * The water and wastewater working groups are starting their efforts to reduce the town's expenses. Various committees will look at usage, distribution, fees, and the OCWA contract.
- * A progress report on the Earth Sciences Centre is expected within two weeks.
- * Councillor Tracy McGibbon is looking for \$3,500 in sponsorship to bring Smash Wrestling back to Bancroft. She will also try to develop interest at area schools.
- * Given that private waste disposal sites are pressing for higher assessments on town-owned waste sites, the town's delegation to the Rural Ontario Municipalities conference will raise the issue again (a higher assessment could raise municipal taxes)
- * The question of a new town logo will be brought back to Committee of the Whole.
- * The town will check further about whether the library could possibly move to Club 580.