

Bancroft group sees progress in meetings with province

By Tony Pearson

The Bancroft delegation to the annual convention of the Rural Ontario Municipal Association, which took place in Toronto last week, returned with some hope for favourable responses from the provincial government on a number of local concerns.

Mayor Bernice Jenkins was particularly pleased with the response of Environment Minister Glen Murray to a question involving the Nutrient Management Act. The fact that the province is continuing to allow the spreading of raw sewage on fields was cited as a factor in Bancroft's recently-revealed \$850,000 deficit in its wastewater operations. The current processing plant was built in the expectation of the mandatory need to treat septage. Without this requirement, the plant is 'over-built'. Jenkins reported that Murray apologized for the province's about-face in its sewage treatment policy, and promised to involve Bancroft in finding solutions to its plant capacity issue.

Another issue on which Jenkins feels Bancroft made progress is the review of the York River Water Management plant. Presently, such a review is not scheduled until 2019. However, Bancroft Council feels that with the 2013 flood, and the alarmingly high water last year, the time to look at changing current river water retention and release policies is as soon as possible, not after four more years of rising water. Jenkins felt that the responses of the Environment Minister and the Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Natural Resources, Eleanor McMahon, were encouraging, and she believes the review will be moved up.

When the delegation met with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, represented by Parliamentary Assistant Lou Rinaldi, they once again raised the issue of public landfill assessment, which could cause a substantial increase in Bancroft's tax payments to the County and school boards. Ministry officials promised a response in the near future, and seemed to suggest that Bancroft would be satisfied with it.

A major potential savings to Bancroft was hinted at, not in any of the meetings, but in the opening address of Premier Kathleen Wynne. Wynne promised to review how 'connecting links' - parts of provincial highways passing through towns - are financed. Mayor Jenkins noted that the town is required to maintain a provincial standard of maintenance on such roads, which can be very costly, and welcomed the review.

Other concerns were raised, but with less expectation of success - for example the phase-in schedule for lowering Bancroft's overpayments for OPP service.

The Bancroft delegation consisted of Mayor Bernice Jenkins, Deputy Mayor Paul Jenkins, CAO Hazel Lambe, and Works Manager Perry Kelly.