

Concerned Citizens reaching out

To the Editor,

The Town of Bancroft has passed its 2017 budget. After being faced with a potential 13.9 per cent increase most residents are relieved that our taxes are only going to be raised 2.11 per cent. On the surface this is a good thing. What they don't tell you is that we already have one of the highest tax mill rates in Hastings County and that another increase is just widening the gap between what we pay and what many others in Hastings County and Ontario pay.

Our sewer operating deficit was \$2 million at the end of 2016 ? water and sewer accumulated deficit. This \$2 million operating deficit was a result of yearly operating deficits dating back to 2011 that were never addressed. The interest on the Line of Credit that has been used to carry this operating deficit has been paid by all taxpayers in Bancroft and Dungannon. I do not have a total of what that has cost us but we can assume that it has been substantial over the course of five years and will continue to increase before the \$2 million is repaid.

The town is going to negotiate a contract with a new water and sewer contractor. What they didn't tell you was that the new price they hope to negotiate with a new company has already been taken into consideration in the Watson report for the Water/Wastewater Accounts and this will not result in a reduction in sewer costs. They also didn't tell you that the Watson Report also took into consideration the grant for checking the sewer system for infiltration. This will not allow for a reduction in the sewer costs.

What they also didn't make clear was the fact that \$200,000 from general taxation and \$100,000 from the gas tax refund will now be put into the sewer account and this will continue to be there now and into the future. For those Bancroft residents that do not have sewer services you are like those in Dungannon and are paying for a service that will never be available to you.

Overall we have an unsustainable sewer system that the province and surrounding municipalities encouraged our council to build so that everyone in North Hastings would have a facility to take their septic tank sludge to be treated. The province was supposed to change the Nutrient Act to ban having raw septic spread on farmers' fields. The province didn't change the law and now Bancroft is left with an unsustainable sewer system. More lobbying to the provincial government needs to happen to find long-term sustainable solutions.

It also has to be clarified that an operating deficit is not a long term debt (LTD). LTD's are loans that are taken out by municipalities to pay for capital expenditures. The town shows LTD to be \$6.8 million at the end of 2016. This does not take into consideration anything for the water main down Snow Road that was completed in 2016. Some of these loans are not paid off until 2041 and the amount of interest paid will be over \$3 million. Then we still have the \$2 million operating deficit in the sewer account and the interest costs on these loans.

According to the ?How Your Tax Dollars Are Spent? graph from the public presentation, we are paying 2.67 per cent for sewer services and 3.25 per cent for Faraday landfill closure costs. This would mean, that in total, Dungannon residents are paying 5.92 per cent of our taxes for services we will never have and for debt on a dump we never used. This hardly seems fair or right to me.

It is also worth noting that we are presently spending seven per cent of our budget to pay for LTD. To increase this by another \$1.5 million for a new public works yard will only add to that 7 per cent not decrease it to the desired five per cent. Another LTD for a new public works yard increases our debt load but does nothing for our bottom line. It won't matter how much it is worth if there are no buyers or anybody to pay for it.

Dungannon dump is the only asset that we have left that is worth any real money on the open market. Please keep informed and engaged to ensure that the dump continues to belong to us, the taxpayers, and is not sold to the highest bidder.

Although it is not all gloom and doom for Bancroft, I do believe that there is still much more transparency and accountability that needs to take place. Residents please continue to be involved and keep informed. Let your council know that you are engaged and will be looking for transparency and accountability moving forward. Also let them know if you have ideas or suggestions on how to grow our town and bring in much needed revenue that will lessen the tax burden we all carry.

Please look for updates on Facebook at the Concerned Citizens of Bancroft and Dungannon Facebook page.

Wilma Brethour

Bancroft