

Council approves community improvement plan

By Tony Pearson

After two full public meetings, the long-discussed Community Improvement Plan was finally adopted at last week's meeting of Bancroft Council; the vote was unanimous. Councillor Paul Jenkins, who as chair of the economic development committee shepherded the process, described it as an excellent blueprint for development. Mayor Bernice Jenkins also felt it provided the township with a good road map, and noted that the provincial Ministry of Municipal Affairs has checked it over as well, seeing no jeopardy in its adoption. The only negative voice came from resident Sherwood Plunkett, who wrote in to express his feeling that the plan created two different classes of businesses in town, and might lead to more red tape. Deb Jeffrey asked if response to climate change was part of the plan; Jenkins assured her that it formed part of the Sustainable Bancroft portion of the blueprint.

In her opening remarks, Jenkins reported on the town's discussions with provincial officials at the recent meeting of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO), warning that the financial impact of the new formula for sharing policing costs wouldn't be known until the OPP presented their new 'bill' in September. Again mentioning that Bancroft has overpaid for OPP services for more than a decade, Councillor Paul Jenkins noted that the OPP's first recommendation (with 73 per cent for 'basic' policing and 27 per cent for actual local calls), which would have benefitted Bancroft, was fought fiercely by AMO. The new proposal for a 60-40 split, which resulted from AMO pressure, is expected to result in higher costs to Bancroft. Accordingly, he gave notice of a forthcoming motion for the town to pull out of AMO. This will generate extensive debate at a future council meeting.

On a five to one vote, council declined a request to support Madawaska Valley's resolution to impose a moratorium on new cell towers. Councillor Don Koppin said that although cell phone towers have drawn numerous charges of health dangers, none have been scientifically proven. Deputy Mayor Wayne Wiggins and Councillor Charles Mullett observed that as not all area residents currently have full cell phone service, more rather than less cell capacity is required.

In other business, council thanked the fire department for its fund-raising efforts, which have produced improvements at both the Dungannon and Bancroft fire halls.

They also decided not to continue the Committee of the Whole experiment, reverting to specialized committees for the remainder of the term. Most councillors felt that Committee of the Whole did not provide enough time to give issues and concerns such as roads and community safety the attention and study they deserved.

In this vein, petitions on resurfacing Quarry Road and restricting landfill traffic on Pinnacle Road were sent to committee for study.

Council also wanted a more in-depth look at the issue of potential provincial legislation on lawsuits launched against public projects.

Councillors wanted reassurance that both the right of dissent, and protection against groundless legal actions, were defended.