

Council 'laughing stock': mayor

By Tony Pearson

Bancroft's Mayor Bernice Jenkins usually spends her opening remarks at council on developments in county and other levels of government, and on good news announcements. Not so at last week's meeting. Instead, she delivered a blast at what she feels is a dysfunctional town council. Finding recent behaviour by councillors 'bewildering,' she proclaimed that council lacked respect for each other, for the mayor, and for town staff. She declared a lack of team spirit, along with an absence of a common sense of direction.

'We have become the laughing stock of the town,' she declared, 'with too much time spent on personal agendas. What happened to honest discussion and compromise? Rude and confrontational behaviour has become normal. And I have no idea how to correct these problems and make council work again.' She asserted that with half its mandate remaining, council had to find a way to work together, and to allow staff to work without interference.

'We're better than this, and the town deserves better,' she declared.

Water tap crisis sidestepped

One issue that prompted the mayor's comments was the recent battle over the public water tap at Millennium Park. Councillor Mary Kavanagh motioned to shut off free water supply, which was resisted by Councillor Bill Kilpatrick, with both attempting to mobilize support for their positions.

Meanwhile, Bancroft's CAO Hazel Lambe decided to write the neighbouring municipalities, noting the non-Bancroft tap users and asking: 'Would your municipality be willing to make a financial contribution to Bancroft to offset the water costs that are currently being carried solely by the town?'

In reply, Wollaston Township council noted that it too has a free water tap. It agreed 'that publicly available potable water is a very important free service.' It pledged 'to continue to provide this service to residents of the surrounding area at no cost.'

In the end, it became a non-issue. Ray and Gail Krupa, owners of the Bancroft Eatery and Brew Pub and Bancroft Brewery, decided to end the fighting by covering the tap's costs. 'We were prompted to action because we know people who need the tap - especially in winter,' Ray Krupa reported. 'Also, we know tourists use the tap and we want to attract tourists.'

'As business owners, we want people to keep coming to town; that way, we can keep the many people on our staff employed,' added Gail.

In addition, newly formed group the Bancroft Concrete Dirt Bike Club, who want to use the sand pits at the old site, kicked in money for tap maintenance.

Deputy Mayor Paul Jenkins said he hoped this would end the issue: 'I would like to thank those who donated to this important service. Hopefully this issue will not resurface again as it could call into play other services that the town provides at no or little cost.'

For their part, the Krupas stated that they 'would absolutely sponsor the tap every year if needed.'

The cost is about \$1,100 a year in total. The town is expected to put up a plaque at the water source thanking the eatery and brewery for their support. Gail Krupa said that this would be a nice touch, 'but we would cover the cost with or without a plaque.'

Council passes up raise

Council unanimously decided that with the town in a financially strapped position, they would forego the proposed 1.75 per cent increase in their remuneration (the level recently agreed to with unionized employees). Rates will remain at 2016 levels: \$15,456 for councillors, \$18,788 for the deputy mayor, and \$26,496 for the mayor.

Wood Share seeks support

Wood Share, a venture of North Hastings Community Trust, wants to build reserves of emergency firewood for people in financial difficulty. Jane Kali was at council to ask for additional help. She observed that the trust gets five to 10 calls a day, with about a third dealing with heating difficulties. It wasn't unusual to hear of furniture being burned for heat, or to have children in snowsuits inside the house.

Wood Share has obtained an initial supply of wood from various donations. Virginia de Carle of BAFIA (Bancroft Area Forest Industry Association, a partner in Wood Share) has received wood culled from Crown land. In addition, Freymond Lumber has given Wood Share a plot on which to store wood. The wood is currently being dried to have it available next winter.

Kali requested town assistance to plow the way into the Freymond wood storage lot. She also wanted to know if the town could drop off burnable wood when it culled trees from its roads and properties.

Lambe replied later on behalf of the town, stating that 'while the town is very supportive of the wood share initiative, staff must

consider the impact to the town.? She noted that the adjacent landowner had first right to wood cut on town land. Lambe also advised that before the town could consider the request to plow the road to the storage lot, it would need to know how many Bancroft residents (versus people from other townships) would benefit, and whether any other municipalities have been approached to contribute.

On other issues, council decided to put a list of properties up for sale. A motion by Kilpatrick to apply revenue from such sales to the water/wastewater deficit was defeated.

Council also learned that this summer's Wheels, Water and Wings festival will be cut back. The car shows, river events, and fly-in will continue, as will the midway, but there will be no stage shows downtown.