

Council pushes free tap vote

By Tony Pearson

After a series of demonstrations at the Millennium Park water tap, the audience at Club 580 cheered when Councillor Mary Kavanagh's motion to immediately decide on shutting off the free public tap failed by a vote of four to three. In favour of suspending the rules to proceed with the issue were Kavanagh, Councillor Charles Mullett and Councillor Barry McGibbon. Voting against were Mayor Bernice Jenkins, Deputy Mayor Paul Jenkins, Councillor Bill Kilpatrick and Councillor Tracy McGibbon.

This doesn't mean that the issue is now settled; it's simply deferred. It will come back to council next week, when a final vote will be taken.

The atmosphere in the room was somewhat testy. Councillor Tracy McGibbon chided those who had taken to Facebook to charge that council didn't care about the rise in water and sewer rates. "We do feel your pain," she stated, "but we have to make tough choices."

Kavanagh's motion to have all unused Bancroft properties declared surplus and put up for sale also motioned to skip the normal two-week waiting period did pass. McGibbon moving to the group in favour. However, several properties on Kavanagh's list were noted to be incorrect (such as the Old Bessemer Trail, still in use, and Block 68, declared redundant some time ago). Deputy Mayor Jenkins therefore suggested that council should wait until they were confident the list was correct. Kavanagh blamed "clerical errors." She said that she had no intention of ramming the motion through and asked that the motion be deferred.

Mullett inquired about the impact of significantly reducing the water and sewer increases for 17 Bancroft restaurants and the laundromat. Jenkins and Kilpatrick asked why other businesses, such as the car wash, as well as not-for-profit agencies such as children's services and seniors' residences weren't on the list.

The discussion indicated a general concern about a two-level rate structure and about reducing revenues when every dollar was important to getting the books in balance. In the end, Mullett agreed that while the discussion was important, the town couldn't afford special rate breaks. He then withdrew his request.

Council continued to address financial issues. With no permanent treasurer hired and the budget assembly process about to start, council appointed Jenkins as their temporary financial liaison with town staff. He will also develop a model for staff financial reports coming to council. CAO Hazel Lambe said that this should cut down on budget "surprises," as well as ensuring that varying viewpoints are brought to bear on the how the town should raise and spend its money.

Lambe reviewed her priorities for the coming year, which include the asset management plan, the visitors' centre, youth engagement, and of course, the water and wastewater finances. She has also taken the first steps to transfer the town's offices to the train station; renovation costs are being obtained.

Further on the water and sewer crisis, Lambe indicated that eight firms have shown some interest in bidding for the new management contract, due this fall. The billing clerk will take on responsibility for analysis of current operations, and along with the CAO and Jenkins, will develop new templates for water and sewer budgeting and reporting.

Search for yard location continues

Consultant Steve Silver continues to work on a new location for the town works yard, although the provincial agency renting the current yard to the town has asked to present a "business case" for staying, notwithstanding their 400 per cent increase in rental fees. Bancroft's objective is to reduce the overall cost of a works yard, including operating expenses.

Recycling operation up
and running

Works manager Perry Kelly noted that the new township recycling operation was up and running on schedule. The town will review collection schedules for possible efficiencies; they will also send out information about recycling practices.

Kelly and his staff were saluted for their work keeping roads open over the holidays despite all the bad weather.

Council meeting with MP

The CAO and deputy mayor will soon meet with MP Mike Bossio about gaining a part of new federal funding to improve Internet connectivity and speed in rural areas.

Council supporting TROUT

Heather Inwood-Montrose, CEO of Community Care North Hastings, came to council to report that she was continuing to pursue multiple discussions with area municipalities, social agencies and taxi services to achieve an integrated regional transportation service, as Haliburton is doing. She wanted confirmation that Bancroft would continue to support the TROUT bus service, in order to access provincial funding. Mayor Jenkins replied that such support would be in the budget.

Walk for Remembrance

returns

Sarah Krieger of the Alzheimer's Society returned to council to announce that the Walk for Remembrance will take place on Saturday, Jan. 28, at North Hastings High School, starting at 9 a.m. Every three seconds, someone in the world develops dementia. In Canada, 25,000 new cases are diagnosed each year. There are currently an estimated 564,000 Canadians living with dementia. In 15 years, this figure will increase by 66 per cent.