

## County approves purchase of new site for Bancroft Warming Centre



**By Nate Smelle**

Hastings County council has officially approved the purchase of a property in Bancroft to serve as the new location for the town's warming centre. The decision was confirmed during a county council meeting on Thursday, March 27.

Following the meeting, Bancroft Mayor Paul Jenkins informed Bancroft This Week that the warming centre will be permanently established at the corner of Billa Street and Highway 28. He acknowledged that the search for a suitable property was extensive but limited by time constraints.

‘An exhaustive search was done for available land with very few and ultimately no other options available,’ Jenkins said. ‘In a perfect world, a larger site suitable for future expansion would have been available but this was not the case in the very limited allowable time for the county to receive provincial funding.’

During the meeting, Hastings County's director of Community and Human Services, Jamie Lynne Osmond, provided council with an update on warming centre usage for February. According to her report, Bancroft's warming centre had an average of eight visitors per day, with six staying overnight. In comparison, the Quinte West centre served about 14 people per day, with nine staying overnight, while Belleville's centre saw 37 visitors daily, with 29 spending the night.

Osmond also noted that staff are currently conducting surveys at all three locations to gather insights from individuals with lived experience of homelessness.

However, some concerns were raised about the cost-effectiveness of the facility in Bancroft, given its relatively low usage. Madoc Mayor and county Councillor Loyde Blackburn questioned whether the numbers would increase once the centre moves to its new location.

‘I think once the mobile unit has moved, there will be an opportunity for persons to stay overnight and sleep in this model,’ Osmond responded. ‘I'm not sure if usage will increase, but through our lived experience surveys, we hope to gain a better understanding of who is staying outside and who is coming inside.’

Indicating that all six of the overnight spaces in the warming centre have been occupied throughout the winter, Mayor Paul Jenkins

explained to his fellow county council members about the size of the space.

?It's not a very big unit,? said Jenkins. ?As far as visitations go, one of the issues through discussions and general information that we have is because of the hours that it operates, and the fact that it's already minus 20 or 25 degrees when they can go in and when they can come out, a lot of them do try to seek something prior to that and don't want to hurt themselves. So, if the day ever comes that we can expand the hours, I think that the general visitations might go up.?

While an exact timeline for the warming centre's relocation has not been announced, Bancroft This Week will continue to follow the story as it develops.