

Let's actually collaborate

To the Editor,

Bill Cheshire's letter a couple of weeks ago talks about collaboration and talking to our neighbours. I think this is a great idea. The county, province and the federal governments have been downloading and burying our small rural municipalities with bureaucratic red tape that has created huge debts and higher taxes for all of us. Something needs to change.

As far as I am concerned, Bancroft is and always will be the hub for North Hastings. We have the only hospital, provincial services and federal ministries offices, chain grocery stores, restaurants and banks and etc. in all of North Hastings. Many of the services have historically and still are only available in Bancroft. The town should be compensated for creating this hub of services for the residents of North Hastings. Instead we are penalized with additional tax burdens and bureaucratic nonsense that has our small municipality drowning in red tape and debt.

Policing is one of the services that the Town of Bancroft has been overcharged for, because of the province's formula. For numerous years the residents of the Bancroft and Dungannon have been charged extra because people come into town for the services and then there is a situation that requires the police to be called. Regardless of where that person lives the taxpayers of Bancroft and Dungannon are charged based on where the call for service originated from. We have been penalized for several million dollars for being the hub for North Hastings. In 2015 the province finally decided that the formula should be changed because 12 municipalities in Ontario, including Bancroft, were being unfairly burdened with policing costs. But, instead of fixing the problem and making everyone pay their fair share, they are using a phase in of five years and the truth is that Bancroft is and will continue to pay more than our fair share for policing now and for the foreseeable future.

If other municipalities really care about the region and the Town of Bancroft as their hub then maybe they could start collaboration by paying their share of the policing costs. Each household and business that is covered by the officers of the Bancroft OPP detachment should be paying equally for that service.

Hastings County has been empire building for many years because they also serve the City of Belleville and Quinte West. Hastings County is a big part of the reason that we have such a shortage of housing. Their land planning and zoning rules do not work well in our rural area. They are also not doing their part to make sure we have affordable housing or even a roof over the heads of some of our most vulnerable people. Hastings County received over \$6 million from the province for housing in 2016. When I asked Darren Burke the manager of housing for Hastings County how much of that \$6 million was spent in Bancroft or North Hastings I was and still am being stonewalled and told that all of the reports are available.

The truth of the matter is that North Hastings consists of seven of the 14 municipalities of Hastings County. It pays 30 per cent of the budget for the housing department at Hastings County but nobody can tell me how much of that was spent on housing in North Hastings. Collaboration of all councils in North Hastings to get the county to do what is best for the residents of North Hastings would be beneficial for all residents in our region.

When our food bank usage has increased by 300 per cent over the summer months, over a third of our kids live in poverty and we have people living in tents in October, maybe it is a time for everyone to look at where we are and where we want to be ? not only as people but as communities in North Hastings. Canada is a rich country. The only reason we have people living in abject poverty is because the governments have been allowed to legislate us into the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer. For the first time the next generation will have less financial success than the current one. Something is very wrong with our system.

Collaboration on doing what is right could go a long way in helping all residents of North Hastings. Let's start talking and communicating as a region. One voice is often lost in the wind but many voices together may be heard.

Wilma Brethour

Bancroft