

Limerick council gets update from Crowe Valley Conservation Authority

By Mike Riley

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Tim Pidduck, general manager/secretary-treasurer of the Crowe Valley Conservation Authority took centre stage at the Limerick Township council meeting on Aug. 21, to update them on some changes at the CVCA regarding Bill 23 changes to the Conservation Authority Act and the resulting Memorandum of Understanding that would be needed between Limerick and the CVCA regarding a program called the Ontario Benthos Biomonitoring Network which would cost them approximately \$580 per year. Pidduck comments on his presentation to The Bancroft Times. Pidduck spoke to Limerick council on Aug. 21 at their meeting to update them some changes at the CVCA regarding Bill 23 changes to the Conservation Authority Act and the resulting MOU that would be needed between Limerick and the CVCA. By provincial directive, the CVCA's programs and services are now divided into three distinct budget categories from 1 to 3. Category 1 are any programs and services provided by the CVCA primarily as a conservation authority and already covered under the pre-existing levy the member municipalities pay each year. Category 2 is any service undertaken by the CVCA as requested by a township. For example, Highlands East hired them to take care of their risk management duties and responsibilities. Category 3 are any other services and programs the CVCA has decided to undertake, like the OBBN program. Pidduck talked about what the OBBN is, which is collecting data on benthic invertebrates' (bottom dwelling aquatic invertebrates) community structure and habitat conditions in various water bodies. This includes; counts of different benthic invertebrates, water chemistry, information about collected samples (geographic coordinates, sampling agencies, collection dates and waterbody types) and descriptions of sampling effort and equipment. He also talked about the financial impact to Limerick, to which there is no increase as they're separating it from their general levy to identify it as a category 3 item, and finally the importance of the program to monitor and track the health of the watershed for the benefit of watershed residents, visitors, and tourists across the watershed including Limerick. An MOU is a non-binding agreement that states each party's intentions to take action, conduct a business transaction or form a new partnership. Pidduck believes his presentation went well considering the amount of information council had to take in in a relatively short period of time. "I could have used the allotted time for each one of the topics! This is a lot for folks to understand and make a decision on after a short presentation and discussion," he says. Covering an area of around 2,006 square kilometres, the Crowe Valley Conservation Authority comprises three primary sub-watersheds; the Crowe River, North River and Beaver Creek, whose environs provide essential habitat to many species of fish, mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, and insects. They've worked in partnership with their 10 member municipalities, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry and Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks for over 60 years providing a variety of water management services. Pidduck told council that the OBBN program is valuable to ensure they know and understand what is happening to our water quality and that consistent monitoring yearly will show them not only where they are in the year they do the testing but also identify trends. "If the water quality begins to slide, it will give all of us time to identify the problem and take action to reverse the trend. Who wants to have poor water quality? Everyone either depends on it for consumption, recreational purposes, or a number of other uses vital for living and enjoying the lakes, rivers, streams and wetlands in this watershed," he says. After Pidduck's presentation, he took questions from council regarding how many municipalities had signed on for this MOU (four so far, with six more hopefully signing on soon including Limerick), and how one or more municipalities not signing on could affect the rest of the municipality's financial obligations to the MOU (approximately \$580 from Limerick), and some qualms about the length of the termination clause for this MOU at one year, which council thought was excessive. Pidduck said he thought the length of the termination clause had something to do with how the CVCA plans their budget each year, but said he would get them more information on that. Pidduck told The Bancroft Times on Aug. 23 that heading into the council meeting, he was certainly hopeful he could obtain a decision to support the MOU since he was already successful with four other municipalities in our watershed. "However, it is good for council to take their time and not rush into a decision as this provincial requirement to classify programs is new to everyone. Council raised some concerns and I would like to offer further explanations. I believe council directed their staff to contact me to give myself an opportunity to do so," he says. "At the end of the day, everyone has to be comfortable with the decision whether to sign the MOU or not."