

Maple St. rezoning worries residents

By Tony Pearson

At last week's meeting of Bancroft town council, it was a non-financial issue which drew out a crowd. The concern was a proposed rezoning on Maple Street. David Gillick, originally from Bancroft, has purchased property on which he would like to build three duplexes for rental tenants. Current street residents are worried that this will create too much new congestion on a street used by school kids, Manor residents, and seniors' fitness groups. They also fear the rental units will change the character of the single-family-residence street, and are concerned that if the zoning is changed, the properties could become apartments or rooming houses.

Gillick insisted that this would never happen, and that the new structures would be quality homes, adding to the very limited affordable rental units in town. Although the Maple Street home owners wanted the request turned down immediately, council opted to send the proposal back to the county for further review of the concerns raised. Meanwhile, town staff will look at a 'site-specific' plan. The zoning issue will come back to council on March 14, with ample public notice given.

Even though it was Valentine's Day, testiness among councillors continued. First was the vote to remove from the meeting agenda several reports from the chief administrative officer, which had been delivered after the Thursday submission deadline.

These included papers on the budget, the water/wastewater situation, and economic development matters.

Then the deputy mayor, who had previously been appointed finance liaison from council to town staff for budget development purposes, reported that he could not get a draft budget from the administration branch, although he had from other branches. Since this meant missing the proposed schedule of seeing a draft by month's end, he resigned his liaison position.

In reply, CAO Hazel Lambe stated that the suggested timeline was unattainable, given that the figures for 2016 were not yet final. She stated that there were new expenses to take account of, and thus the original schedule could not be met. She also reported that an anticipated budget surplus for last year was now looking like a small deficit (estimated now at below \$50,000), due to extra school board taxes and the initial payment for the train station property.

The meeting also introduced the new interim treasurer, Arthur Smith. Smith is a part-time controller and senior analyst with Corvee Accounting. He has previously served as treasurer for the town of French River, corporate account manager for the City of Saskatoon, and finance manager for the city of North Battleford. Lambe stated: 'We look forward to benefiting in overall financial management and public financial reporting from Arthur. In the few days that Arthur has been with the town, we have experienced significant progress in our financial management and practices.'

Smith and Lambe expressed their belief that a draft budget could be ready by late March or early April. Lambe also wants financial plans projecting into the 2018 fiscal year.

Another financial matter arose from a motion by Councillor Charles Mullett to prohibit the sale of the Dungannon landfill site, an idea floated as a means of eliminating the town's large sewer deficit. Mullett worried loss of the landfill to private hands might mean 'short-term gain for long-term pain,' with Bancroft having to pay to use its own site. He also noted that the landfill serves the entire township, while the costs of the water/wastewater system are supposed to be borne by its users.

In turn, Mayor Jenkins noted that there were a number of ways in which the landfill might produce revenue; sale was one, leasing was another 'and there was the possibility of accepting waste from other townships. Deputy Mayor Jenkins felt that the current market value and the type of contract that could be arranged for use after sale needed investigation. Councillor Mary Kavanagh wanted to explore the potential for opening the waste site to other municipalities, either just in the area or on a wider basis.

In the end, the motion was defeated on a 4-3 vote, with councillors Barry and Tracy McGibbon joining Mullett in support, while the mayor, deputy mayor, and councillors Kavanagh and Kilpatrick voted in opposition. Council was promised more information by April, the mayor suggesting that a consultant might be brought in further down the road.

After the meeting, Mullett stated a number of people had approached him to express their disappointment that the motion failed, as they want the site to remain in municipal hands. At the same time, he hoped that other revenue possibilities might arise, such as opening the new recycling facility to other towns.

As for improving the functioning of council, Mayor Jenkins and human resources chair Mullett drew attention to the municipal code of conduct, as well as the policy on using social media. The mayor noted that just like in the code, social posts were expected to show respect for council and staff. Both cautioned against individual councillors putting undue burdens on staff, or attempting to 'micro-manage' town operations.