

Monkey business at Bancroft council



By Bill Kilpatrick

In an effort to bring their bylaws into compliance with the administrative monetary penalty system, or AMP for short, the Town of Bancroft is reviewing and updating many of their older bylaws. According to an information brief presented to the city of Cobourg, the AMP system is "an emerging approach to dealing with minor by law infractions in a manner that is fair, effective, and efficient," and is meant to replace the former Provincial Offences Act which saw many offences dealt with at the Superior Court level, a process that was deemed by the province to "consume significant resources." For the Town of Bancroft, the process began back in November of 2023, then at the March 27 committee of the whole meeting, Marc Pharand, the by law enforcement officer, presented changes to the town's sign by law. Little did they know that this would set off a storm of controversy and a campaign to save a roof top inflatable on a local business that was deemed to be in danger of removal because of the updated bylaw. According to Pharand, the goal behind the changes to the bylaw were to "make it more relevant, clean up the formatting," and make it more "user friendly." The proposed new bylaw under section 16 entitled "prohibited promotional items and signage" read as follows: "Inflatable signage, including promotional inflatables or temporary inflatables for the purpose of drawing attention to a commercial retail storefront, excluding inflatables for the purpose of an event, in which case the inflatable shall not be erected for longer than 21 days." Pharand pointed out that the bylaw does not apply to citizens but only to commercial business and was being brought forward due to distraction and safety concerns. Mayor Paul Jenkins explained to Bancroft This Week that the previous sign bylaw that was passed in 1998 did not allow for inflatables at all, but the new proposed changes made provisions for them on a temporary basis, but not everyone saw it this way. "Everybody was under the impression that we just rewrote this bylaw to attack Ramsy," explained Jenkins, but he said that was not the case at all. However, the owners of Vance Motors, Matt and Lianne Sauter, who own Ramsy, a large inflatable gorilla that sits atop their business at the corner of Station Street and Hastings Street, did see it that way, and wrote a letter to Bancroft council in protest. The letter was subsequently posted online and stated that they "felt singled out by the proposed changes" being that they are "one of the only businesses in Bancroft with an inflatable." The letter went on to outline their disappointment with a lack of communication with the town prior to the changes to the bylaw. The letter further stated that they are looking at expanding the dealership and were hoping to stay in Bancroft, but due to this incident, they "no longer want to." The letter further explained that their goal of placing the inflatable atop their business was to attract attention to their establishment but was also to "create excitement and fun in the downtown," something they feel is "seriously needed." When the bylaw was brought to council for approval on April 10, Mayor Jenkins reiterated that the new bylaw allowed for inflatables unlike the old bylaw and it was being brought forward because of safety concerns regarding both inflatables, and signs on those inflatables, but council did not agree with the mayor's assessment. Councillors Tracy McGibbon, Wayne Wiggins, and Deputy Mayor Charles Mullett all agreed that inflatables and signs on inflatables do not pose a safety threat if secured properly or are a dangerous distraction. McGibbon pointed

out that there has not been an increase in accidents because of the inflatable on top of Vance Motors. One of the arguments put forward at the council table was that most municipalities have by laws banning inflatables to which McGibbon responded, "We can be the community that does things a little differently. We don't have to follow and conform to everything else." Mullett then put forward a motion for staff to rewrite the bylaw to allow inflatables and signs on inflatables, but no solid signage, pending a safety inspection and proof of liability, and bring it back to council again. The motion passed 4-1 with councillors McGibbon, Wiggins, George Eastma, and Deputy Mayor Mullett voting in favour, and Mayor Jenkins voting against. Bancroft This Week reached out to Matt and Lianne who said that they, "Appreciate everything council does do," adding that had the vote gone the other way "we would have complied." They further pointed out that they are not looking to be confrontational and as soon as the provisions in the 1998 by law regarding roof top signage was brought to their attention, they removed Ramsy's shirt that said "sale," in order to be in compliance. For now, the Sauter's are playing the waiting game. "We await the next council meeting to find out how the by law will be written and if council chooses to put a permit system in place or to not allow signage versus inflatables, we're going to comply no matter what. We're hoping he gets to stay, and he gets to stay in a fun lively capacity for the Town of Bancroft. People seem to enjoy him."