

Parking becomes more limited in downtown Bancroft



By Bill Kilpatrick

For those who struggle to find parking in downtown Bancroft, things have now gotten worse. On or around Dec. 1, Bill Hawley, the owner of the parking lot that divides Scotiabank and McMichael Jewelers, placed a number of concrete blocks around the vacant lot preventing anyone from parking there. The vacant lot, according to an email from Andra Kauffeldt, general manager for the Town of Bancroft, has been used as a municipal parking lot for many years under an agreement with the town whereby Hawley was given a tax rebate and in exchange the vacant lot would be "used for municipal parking with the town assuming full costs for maintenance of that parking area and the associated liability." Prior to 2023 the agreement between the town and Hawley expired and negotiations ensued, but changes proposed by Hawley were rejected by Bancroft council twice. "For several years, the town had an agreement with the private property owner for use of the previous parking lot," wrote Kauffeldt, "That agreement expired a number of years ago and in 2023 the town reached out with an extension to the original agreement with no changes proposed to the terms and condition. The private landowner did not agree to the town's proposed lease extension document and instead proposed several changes and a new agreement which were rejected by council in mid 2024. At that time council directed staff to formally end the arrangement and remove the signage identifying it as a municipal parking lot. An updated proposal was subsequently submitted by the private landowner and reviewed by council in November 2024 which was also rejected." It's not clear what the sticking points are between Hawley and the town, but it may involve a request by Hawley that the town make a rental payment for use of the property. Bancroft This Week reached out to Hawley for comment, but he did not respond by press time. It's also not clear how long Hawley plans on leaving the concrete blocks in place, but as Kauffeldt points out, they could be there for a while. "A landowner is able to do whatever they wish with their property providing the use conforms to the zoning by law, the property standards by law and other municipal by laws," wrote Kauffeldt, "If the landowner chooses to block access to his private property in a way that conforms to municipal bylaws and standards, the town has no remedy to force alternative action." Kauffeldt says that the town "appreciated" the agreement that they had with Hawley and remain "hopeful that an opportunity to collaborate for the benefit of the community will come forward again in the future." Until that time parking will continue to be an issue for those looking for street parking in the downtown core, an issue that will only become worse once the tourist season arrives.