

## Sewer mystery continues

By Tony Pearson

The math is both simple and puzzling.

A little over 800 households and business are hooked up to Bancroft's sewer system.

The amount they send to the waste treatment plant should be about the same amount as they take in from the town's water pipes.

But what actually flows into that plant is more than two and a half times the volume that houses and stores would logically put into the sewers.

The financial result is staggering for a small town ? a \$400,000 annual deficit. To put it another way, the sewer deficit is costing the township roughly what it costs to maintain the fire department.

Attempts to discover the source of the extra flow have not yet been successful. CAO Hazel Lambe reported that no major leaks have been detected.

Some houses have to leave their water running through the winter to prevent pipe freeze-up, but the total amount of water is not significant.

Some correlation between heavy rainfall and larger inflows to the treatment plant suggests that the extra volume being treated ? and billed to Bancroft ? is simply rain.

This could be getting into the sewer pipes through cracked manhole covers.

It could be storm sewers leaking into regular sewer lines. Whatever it is [sewer line cleaning](#) is a good option when it comes to unblocking sewer lines so there are no further problems.

Alternately, it might be spill from large flat roofs on large buildings, including the high school.

Or part of the problem might be household gutters either draining directly or leaking into sewer pipes. If your gutters are leaking then the chances are they are blocked and you should think about contacting [Clean Pro Gutter Cleaning Columbus](#) or a similar company as they can professionally clean them out for you.

Another possible source is household sump pumps putting rainwater into the sewer system through bad or illegal connections.

There's even a suggestion that an underground marsh is flowing in the sewer lines. This would likely cause sewage backups, so if this is the case it might be worth finding the contact details for a company like [ServiceMaster Restoration by Zaba](#) so that you are prepared should this happen in your property. At the moment, no one is sure as to why this is happening.

This can be heartbreaking for the residents in the area, as this could have an effect on both the interior and exterior of your home.

Before you even decide to buy a house, it may be in your best interest to [inspect the sewer line](#) to have a better understanding of whether this could be a problem that arises in the future. By doing this, you will be able to put in preventative measures before experiencing any potential sewage problems. It can become even harder to resolve the situation if you don't know what has caused it.

There's also the question of the size of the sewage treatment plant.

It was "overbuilt" in the expectation of increased business as the province outlawed the spreading of raw sewage on farmers' fields. But then the province backed away from taking this step, leaving Bancroft with a facility beyond its needs ? but capable of taking in lots of water whose origin is unknown.

OCWA, Ontario Clean Water Agency, which manages the treatment plant, sent the town a four-page letter which concurred that there was a lot more water going to its plant than should be expected.

It identified possible causes ? again, rainwater being a likely culprit, with "water theft" a further possibility ? and recommended that the situation be studied some more.

OCWA wants to meet the town to discuss what to study, and how much its research would cost.

At town council's finance and growth committee last week, a number of actions were discussed.

Metering sewer outflow from homes and stores is seen as too expensive, and unlikely to yield a solution. Sending a camera along the sewer lines was felt a more promising tactic.

But Deputy Mayor Paul Jenkins posed the most ominous suggestion ? namely, a major increase in sewage charges.

Again, the math is easy; with 800 or so users, it would take a \$500 annual rate hike to eliminate the deficit.

As the deficit will continue as long as the current volumes are being treated, the extra charge would continue until the problem is solved.

Mayor Bernice Jenkins and Councillor Charles Mullett objected that since the deficit isn't the fault of current users, it would be unfair to saddle them with the cost overruns.

Councillor Bill Kilpatrick noted that many Bancroft households have less than \$40,000 in total income, and already face constantly rising hydro rates.

Deputy Mayor Paul Jenkins replied that it is also unfair to impose the costs on all Bancroft ratepayers, including those without sewer service, which is the consequence of failing to solve the problem.

He thought that facing such a sizable increase might galvanize action to determine the cause of the leakage, and pointed to the uproar in Madawaska Valley at the suggestion that the whole township might pay part of the costs for Barry's Bay's water.

Bancroft isn't the only area facing financial problems from water and sewage. Barrie may be looking at a 20 per cent hike in sewer charges.

However, there the issue has another dimension ? namely, building up reserves to pay for the cost of repairing or replacing outdated infrastructure ? especially the pipes. That possible cost hasn't yet been factored in for Bancroft.

In the end, the committee decided to set up a special committee to explore solutions.

The commission will include members of the public, especially those with experience in water and sewer management, and report directly to council.

Those who think they can help are asked to contact deputy clerk Lianne Sauter at the town office. In addition, the town will consider other actions:

1. camera surveys of pipes in suspect areas;
2. checks of drainages at large commercial and institutional buildings (those which might channel excess water into sewers)
3. a flow meter on the main sewer line
4. a request for another meeting with the province about farm run-off treatment
5. an investigation of available grants for infrastructure repair
6. a financial report on long-term financial implications of the water and sewer problems.

The last item covers a point not yet seriously raised, namely, that the inflow of regular water to the processing plant is also above what's being billed for. This hasn't become a sore point yet because water rates still cover the losses.

So the mystery will stay under investigation. For no matter what the normal temperature of sewer lines, this is definitely not a cold case.