

Should the park tap be free?

By Sarah Sobanski

If you were on social media over the past weekend you would've seen the debate sparked between Town of Bancroft Councillor Bill Kilpatrick and Councillor Mary Kavanagh over the Millennium Park free water tap.

Kavanagh submitted a notice of motion to council to have the tap shut off. She also submitted a request so that council could both discuss and vote on the motion on the same day ? something that is not usually done but as Kavanagh later suggested via Facebook is within the legal writings of the democratic process. The decision to approve or deny the request to table the motion the same day it appears as a notice is voted on by council.

The motion reads: ?Whereas the water system in the TOB is user only funded, whereas the TOB is running a deficit in the water supply system, whereas the TOB has been required to increase user fees substantially, whereas there are businesses in town that sell water and there is one which relies only on the sale of water. Be it resolved that the public water tap at Millennium Park be shut off immediately (January 2017) and that staff look into the cost of a mechanism that will allow citizens to pay for water at the public tap.?

Kilpatrick took to Millennium Park prior to council's meeting advocating for the tap to be left on and to bring awareness that a notice of motion would appear in council's agenda to the public ? where it might also be voted on immediately. He wrote on Facebook during his protests, ?Thanks again for all the support, love, and warm liquids. We're going to win this, because it's what's right and just. Love.?

According to correspondence between CAO Hazel Lambe and Kilpatrick, the accumulative cost of the tap between Bancroft households in 2016 was about \$1,061. With the rate increase, those charged would share a cost of about \$1,123. Kilpatrick calculated that this meant Bancroft households were paying 66 cents to keep the tap operating.

When reading this, leaving the tap on seems like a no-brainer. The cost is peanuts. It's less than a \$1.

Kilpatrick posted a video of a man who stopped at the tap to fill up on drinking water because his well was frozen. The tap seems to be a crutch for community members who sometimes find themselves without a leg to stand on ? burst pipes, failing wells, those who can't afford water and the future those who may not be able to afford water because of council's recent rate hikes.

These points make the debate seem black and white. They are not however, the whole story.

Sitting down with Kavanagh Jan. 9, she talked me through some of the reasons she had made the notice of motion to shut off the tap. Before arriving she had started a Facebook account to get her voice out in a similar fashion as Kilpatrick. There she also posted her reasoning.

Kavanagh wrote and discussed with me that in the wake of the town's rate hike, many people are wondering why the town hasn't shut down the tap. She suggested she submitted the motion in hopes that the costs of the tap would be brought into the light. She estimated that now that there were hard numbers of the cost of the tap that many would forget about shutting it off.

Kavanagh was more interested in the conversation submitting the motion would bring to council. She said she thought it would help highlight the water and wastewater crisis where she said she believes every penny counts.

While the tap is not costing Bancroft households much, Kavanagh said she has seen it abused. She gave an example where she saw a contractor stop at the tap to fill up with water to take to mix cement. (The water that comes from the tap is drinking water. It's a waste to use it to mix cement.) She was also concerned that cottagers used the tap, people she noted could afford to live in Toronto. She said if that was the case, why couldn't they be spending money buying water from local businesses instead of getting it for free. Kavanagh asked me why the tap couldn't be turned off at Millennium Park and instead one put in at the food bank for those in need. While that might not work, the statement queried for other positive solutions for the tap.

I'm not going to weigh in on who is right and who is wrong ? there are good points on both sides. I hear the argument of save the tap ? what if you need it one day. I also hear the argument of how do we make this tap economically feasible so that it benefits those who draw from it but also those who might not and are paying for it.

These are the surface points of the debate that blew up over social media. If I've said it once, I've said it a million times ? remember that social media is not the be all and end all. Everything is public information.

Call Kilpatrick, call Kavanagh, go to their Facebook pages, go to a council meeting and become thoroughly versed in not just this debate, but the entire wastewater and water debacle. It's something all Bancroft residents need to work towards a solution on.

UPDATE: Council voted against tabling Kavanagh's motion concerning the tap Jan. 10. It will now be discussed next council meeting.