

Town chooses water and wastewater contractor

By Sarah Sobanski

Bancroft has begun negotiating with the lowest bidder for town water and wastewater management.

Council chose to pursue a contract with Veolia for the future operations, maintenance and management of its water and wastewater systems at a special meeting of council Sept. 26.

"In this last stage we were down to three candidates," said Bancroft acting mayor Paul Jenkins. "They had all gone back and resubmitted so everything was common. On the initial bids, some provided extra services. We had them all go back and bid on common terms."

Over the next five years, Veolia's projected cost was \$3.22 million. It beat out past water and wastewater systems operator OCWA at \$3.25 million and PUSI at \$3.34 million. This includes the costs of the water and wastewater plant's transition from one company to another.

Jenkins said now, the town will "fine-tune" the contract with Veolia. The negotiations will "mainly focus on price," and, if all goes according to plan, the town will award operations to Veolia within the week, he said.

"It's been a long detailed process, it's taken quite a while to get down to this point that we are here but we're just trying to make sure that we get the best service for the best price for the residents of Bancroft," said Jenkins.

He added, "When we signed this contract five years ago, there was no competition. [OCWA was] the only people that we could get to run it," said Jenkins. "OCWA also says that over the last five years that [it's raised its] operating efficiency so that's why [it] was able to lower [its] bid down this time."

When asked if finalizing the contract would impact the dramatic increase to water and wastewater rates that was made by the town last year, Jenkins suggested it was unlikely. He said the rate increases were based on the projected reduced cost of the contract for the next five years as well as paying off the town's operating deficit.

"We are going to reexamine all of the scenarios," said Jenkins. "I think it's going to be pretty close. Once we go through this final negotiation stage we'll be able to determine how close we were in guessing what the final contract price was going to be." He noted that rates could fluctuate depending on positive or negative impacts to Bancroft's water and wastewater in the coming years.

The new contract does not include the cost of electricity. Jenkins said the town is planning on taking electricity back in-house in hopes that it will cost less.