

Town wastewater to receive FCM funding

By Nate Smelle

Bancroft's water and wastewater committee met to discuss ways of making the town's system sustainable and affordable for everyone in the community. During the meeting, CAO Hazel Lambe announced that the town would be receiving \$163,000 from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities to participate in a wastewater optimization study through the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change. The funds will be used to conduct an extensive review of the wastewater system in Bancroft over the next two years, with the intention of finding greater efficiency in the system. Although this type of review has been done on wastewater systems in larger municipalities, such a study has yet to be conducted on a system in a town the size of Bancroft. By participating in the optimization initiative, Lambe said the data collected through the review will be used to help other municipalities find out how to reduce their costs and improve their efficiencies.

"It's an in-depth examination of all the operations of the wastewater treatment facility, to find efficiencies in all operations of management," said Lambe.

"What has been found is that a lot of error in costs have been derived from human error, and not so much the mechanical. The tracking of the data will ensure the facility is operating the way that it should be. So once that system is set up and we see a spike somewhere, we can catch it immediately and adjust the problem that is causing it."

Senior policy analyst at the MOECC, Aaron Law has been working on the innovation side of wastewater system optimization. Lambe said he will be working alongside the town to complete the study. Indicating that Veolia's review of the water and wastewater system's capital assets is distinct from the study, Lambe indicated that Bancroft's incoming operation's manager, Duane Forth will be participating in both initiatives. Reducing the costs of operating the system.

"If we could reduce what we are using at the plant, it should also reduce our costs," she said.

"It is also addressing climate change in terms of our water. In our application [for the FCM funding], the trend of the increase in rainfall for Bancroft is forecasted to be much higher in years to come. So again, to address climate change we need to be ready and have things optimized."

The committee also received a report put together by staff, that affirmed the urgency of the need for improvement. By comparing the town's water and wastewater operations with systems in eight other similar municipalities, the report showed that Bancroft's sewer rate is three to four times higher than the other communities studied. It also drew attention to the fact that of the eight communities looked at, Bancroft had the lowest median household income at \$46,000 and the second highest rates for water and wastewater. The only municipality that had higher rates than Bancroft was Cavan-Monaghan. However, with a median household income of \$90,000 they are in a better position to absorb the higher costs than Bancroft.

Chair of the water and wastewater committee Councillor Bill Kilpatrick was not surprised by the study's findings. He pointed out that they backed up similar findings in the 2005 Water Tight report, which stated, "Unquestionably, the smallest plants – those serving, roughly, fewer than 2,000 customers – have the highest unit costs, and that threshold can be expected to rise with increasing regulatory and technical complexity. Many systems with the highest costs are located in communities with lower-than-average incomes, where affordability is a large concern." Because Bancroft has only 1,100 people on town water; and approximately 800 people connected to its wastewater system, Kilpatrick said the system is clearly unsustainable.

"People are having their water shut off due to the high rates and low incomes will only continue as arrears and costs continue to climb," he said.

"There needs to be county and provincial intervention to come up with long-term solutions, as opposed to short term band aid solutions. Long-term solutions will ensure that water remains safe and clean and above all is both affordable, and accessible to all of the residents of Bancroft. Everyone, regardless of income levels, should have access to water and sewer without having to choose between water and rent, or water and food or water and heat."