

When needs become commodities

By Sarah Sobanski

Earlier this month I attended a town hall on the wastewater rate hikes in town. The event was well attended. One man wanted to know how schools would be impacted.

In 2016, Hastings Prince Edward District School Board paid \$6,400 for York River Public School and \$13,500 for North Hastings High School for wastewater. The Algonquin and Lakeshore District School Board related that Our Lady of Mercy Catholic School paid \$3,750 for wastewater.

Communications representatives for each school board suggested that increases from the town could be accommodated in their budgets. The board assured me that utilities costs would not be paid through school budgets but through central office budgets. That's great that these won't come out individual school budgets, but where does it end?

With the increases, our high school will cost the board more than \$20,000 for wastewater this year. This brings a whole new light to the impact these increases will have on our community. What other community players will be impacted? What other impacts haven't we thought of yet?

I've been wondering where and when it started that we began trading necessities as commodities. I'd imagine it started when the owner of a homestead was too busy or too lazy to go down to the river himself or herself to fetch water from the river, so he or she hired someone else to do it. Maybe that developed into the water fetcher caring for the water as well, boiling it for the table, etc. A couple millennia later and OCWA was born. Whoops.

I wonder if Thomas Edison thought about the commercial distribution of electricity when he first turned on that lightbulb. Did the caveman rub his hands together greedily when he threw rocks at wood and they spontaneously caught on fire? Alas, I'll never know. Instead, I'm left wondering why heat and water are so marked up no one can afford them. Surely it doesn't all relate to the convenience of water coming through your tap ? if you've ever been to a cottage you know it's not that hard to throw a hose in the lake ? or being able to flush your waste. Maybe it comes from wanting a comfy 68 degrees in your house during the winter. What did people do before they could wear tank tops inside in all seasons?

It's questions like this, within a couple hundred grains of salt, that have sparked the self-sustainability movement. People across the world are bringing supporting their human needs back within their control. They're fed up with not being able to afford their needs. Can't afford groceries? Grow a garden. Not just a garden, an ecosystem fitted to your household that can produce and feed you year round ? assuming no GMOs, lots of seed saving, pickling and all the ways to store food for the cold seasons. It's unfortunate that Canada has such a short growing season, that can make it a little bit harder ? still, doable. Can't afford heat? Install a wood stove. There are community initiatives to gain access to wood. Goods can be traded for services, volunteering, helping. Where, however, does that leave us with water? Wells and septs aren't cheap. Not everyone can afford to install them. Also, it's not everywhere that they can be installed. The free tap perhaps ? let's not start that debate up again.

This community has come leaps in bounds in the last little while developing sustainable solutions for poverty. I'm not sure however, that there is a community initiative for water and wastewater. That being said, the minds exist in this community to find those solutions for those who cannot afford water and wastewater.

I was having a conversation with a friend the other day. I was explaining how my boyfriend had become involved with volunteering weekly. It started with someone reaching out to him with a problem. There was and is no group in place to volunteer formally for this problem, but he volunteered anyway. I told my friend, that's just how it works in Bancroft. You have a problem, the community helps you fix it.

Now, if we could just put up a massive wall and start a utopian society where goods and services are traded and everyone contributes to a self-sustaining system and infrastructure. Show me where to sign.