

Wollaston council looks at transportation options

By Jim Eadie

A visibly dismayed Wollaston Township council learned at their March 8 regular meeting that their application for federal funding to support a proposed Asset Based Community Development Project has been denied.

Despite encouragement and endorsement from the staff at Community Futures, the board of directors has denied our request for funding, said Jennifer Cohen, township clerk. The desired objectives for projects has changed with a largely new board. The board is not looking to fund studies or planning, but would rather fund a project. Chris Drost was very surprised and disappointed.

Drost was hired by council in February to apply for two grants that would allow a person to be hired by the municipality for 20 hours a week, beginning in September of this year and running through 2017. This would cost approximately \$40,000, including expenses. Drost sounded upbeat at the time about the municipality's prospects of success accessing funding from CFDC and the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs rural economic development (RED) fund. If successful, the municipality would have been required to contribute at least 10 per cent, which would amount to approximately \$4,000.

We can still apply for the RED grant, but then we will be 50 per cent short. That changes things, said Cohen. We could scale back the project to 10 hours a week. We could take out some things, or spread the project out. The RED application is very complex, and will be due by April 15. I hate to see it die, but ??

We have to do something, said Councillor Michael Fuerth. We can't just do nothing because a grant got turned down. Can we dialogue with Chris [Drost] about a July application to RED, try to achieve an implementable phase, and then re-apply to CFDC? Cohen was directed to consult further with Drost and bring back revised options to be considered by council at their next meeting. Council also had invited Gwen Coish to address council, and to discuss a proposal for a community supported transportation option that could be provided by Bancroft Community Transit (BCT). We have good vehicles, and we have amazing drivers, said Coish. What we would offer is cost effective, and safe.

Coish proposed that the Township of Wollaston become the client of BCT, and pay to have residents picked up either weekly, or bi-weekly in the hamlet. We have vans that will accommodate five passengers easily and comfortably, along with their groceries, she said. She noted that Fridays would be a good day, and that clients would access the TROUT bus in Bancroft for shuttling around town. The BCT driver would collect a reasonable fare set by the municipality from each rider, and the money collected would be deducted from the invoice to the municipality.

We do get a lot of phone calls from Coe Hill people needing rides, she said. It is expensive with one person trips, and this way people could schedule doctor appointments and shopping all on the same day. BCT would also collect statistical data on ridership to help make future decisions about who, how, when, where and how often decisions could be made.

Coish noted that BCT is willing to try out a project on a temporary basis. No need to sign a contract. Just try it out for a while to see where it is going, she said. Let's keep it simple, but customized around the true need for the community.

The cost to the municipality before fares are deducted would be \$75 per week for one van.

This service needs to be on a regular basis if it is to be used regularly, said Cohen.

If you find that two vans are needed, we can cross that bridge when we come to it, said Coish.

This would be a community transportation service, said Fuerth. What is being proposed would be open to anyone, including a young guy like me. We can try it for a while.

What will get ridership up will be reasonable fares, and regular trips, said Reeve Graham Blair. That's why the TROUT went in the can.

Remember, this is not public transit, reminded Cohen. Community transportation is a good name for it. Bi-weekly cost of this BCT service is just under \$2,000 per year, which is what we have set aside in our budget, noted Cohen. TROUT wanted over \$7,000 for pickup once a month, and the clients paid a fare in top of that.

Quite interesting, considering the financial implications, said Blair.

You can't otherwise manage here without a car, said Fuerth. Let's continue this discussion with our budget discussions.

Council decided to move the discussion into budget deliberations that are ongoing.