

Agriculture motion defeat won't stop councillor

By Sherwood Hines

Bancroft Councillor Bill Kilpatrick introduced a motion at a town council meeting in early November to ask staff to research allowing Bancroft residents to raise small livestock (chickens, pigs, goats). It was meant as a potential means of addressing local poverty and sustainable food issues.

Kilpatrick's idea was to have staff research how other Canadian towns and cities are doing urban agriculture and then return in April, 2017 with recommendations on what might work with Bancroft. It was defeated five to two without discussion. (Deputy Mayor Paul Jenkins was the only other council member in favour of the motion.)

Vancouver, Montreal, Moncton, Kitchener and Whitehorse are but a few of the Canadian cities that now allow for some form of urban livestock farming.

‘If cities like Vancouver and Calgary can allow backyard chickens there is absolutely no reason why Bancroft can't get on board with this idea,’ said Kilpatrick. ‘We have the space and the local knowledge to do it. There are acute poverty issues in our community and we need to look at new ways to address that problem.’

When *Bancroft This Week* asked for clarification Mayor Bernice Jenkins said she felt that it would be an encroachment on a neighbour's right to enjoy their property if he or she had to deal with the noise and smells of farm animals next door. She also argued that Bancroft can't afford the additional cost of a bylaw officer needed to enforce new urban agriculture restrictions. She said she didn't see urban agriculture as a priority for council at that time.

Councillor Mary Kavanagh, in a memo first sent around to other council members and then sent to *Bancroft This Week*, highlighted that she thought the insurance issues, vet bills, shelter costs, and animal waste cleanup would be too restrictive for people to afford. She also wanted to highlight that there are currently no restrictions on gardening or growing fruit trees. She thinks that a community farming option may be a more reasonable option. When asked, however, she stated that she had no intention of forwarding such a motion at that time.

Councillor Charles Mullet argued that Bancroft already receives too many complaints about noise and animal waste problems to add urban agriculture issues to the mix. He also said he would prefer to see some form of community farming option within an area restricted for such purposes.

Jane Kali, program co-ordinator of the anti-poverty initiative at North Hastings Community Trust, noted that Bancroft needs to take an entirely new approach to thinking about food sustainability.

‘We need an approach that is more holistic and inclusive of the region's poverty issues. Hastings County is the second poorest county in Ontario. I would like to see Bancroft council sit with interested community members and agencies and brainstorm a sustainable food strategy that includes community gardening, fruit growth, and urban livestock needs.’

In response to the defeat of the motion, Kilpatrick hosted a community discussion on urban agriculture at North Hastings Community Integration on Alice Street on Nov. 15. Approximately 10 community members attended.

The group agreed that they would go through with their own research into how other communities have implemented urban agriculture strategies, especially around the idea of co-operative farming. Kilpatrick agreed to their bringing their findings to council in the spring for further review.