

Bancroft council deals with grants controversies

By Tony Pearson

Bancroft council dealt last week and this week with a number of controversial applications for town support, from organizations like the Chamber of Commerce, North Hastings Children's Services, and TROUT public transit.

Last year, council gave the chamber \$15,000 toward the visitors' centre it operates. For this year, council initially voted to make no grant at all. In making their decision, they noted that the county has increased its financial commitment to the chamber as the ?Destination Marketing Organization? for North Hastings by \$16,000. They also noted that no other municipality in North Hastings contributes substantially to the chamber.

Chamber general manager Greg Webb and the chamber board stated that the county grant was for area-wide marketing activity ? advertising and promotion ? and that the town's money has been used to staff the visitors' centre. A cut in the town's support would then imply a cut to the hours, days, and months when the centre would be open. It might even cause the Canadian Heritage Department to ask for the return of much of the \$348,000 it donated for the station's restoration.

At a subsequent meeting of council's committee of the whole Monday evening, the decision was made to give the chamber \$4,000. This came after an attempt by Deputy Mayor Paul Jenkins to continue the \$15,000 grant for one more year was rejected, with only Mayor Bernice Jenkins supporting him. Councillor Charles Mullett suggested that the town could move the caboose currently at the train station down to the Bancroft museum, and use it and possibly Santa House as a visitors' centre. Councillor Barry McGibbon noted that many towns have unstaffed visitors' centres, especially in the off-season.

As a \$15,000 grant had been projected in the budget, the decision freed \$11,000 for other purposes. \$3,000 was re-allocated to grants, and \$8,000 as a contingency fund for special projects. Additional money was also transferred to grants from projected signage costs, some of whose funding was switched to the parks reserve.

Council then decided to increase the grant to the Wheels/Water/Wings festival from \$3,000 to \$6,000. This was prompted by news that the Ontario government had turned down WWW's request for a Celebrate Ontario grant.

In another grant decision, council reversed a previous committee resolution that would have limited its investment in the Saw-Tech logging expo to a table at \$1,800.

Deputy Mayor Jenkins instead proposed a sponsorship at the \$5,000 level. Despite the opposition of councillors Bill Kilpatrick and Mary Kavanagh, the higher amount was approved.

In another controversial area, despite suggestions that the town's support of TROUT transit might be cut, council decided to grant the same \$7,000 it had the previous year.

On the other hand, grant applications from the Art Gallery of Bancroft and the Curling Club were rejected.

Another organization expressing dismay at town grants policy was North Hastings Children's Services (NHCS), which took over the running of children's summer camps from the town in 1999.

Last year, employing 14 local youth as counsellors, NHCS provided nearly 300 children between the ages of five and 12 with a week of free summer camp.

The camps are held in Millennium Park, with Club 580 as a back-up.

The town has provided these free of charge so far.

However, the discovery that half the campers come from outside Bancroft prompted a number of councillors to urge that other municipalities contribute financially (most of the actual cost is met by the county, with NHCS fundraising for the rest).

They proposed that next year, the town charge NHCS \$10,000 for use of its facilities, then waive the percentage of that fee that represents Bancroft children ? forcing NHCS to collect money to pay Bancroft from other towns whose children attend the camp. The \$10,000 is essentially a theoretical amount, since the park is public, and Club 580 is very seldom rented during the weekday. NHCS has accordingly started a survey of parents about moving the camp outside of Bancroft.

Other towns have apparently expressed interest in hosting the camp.

One thing NHCS director Jessica Anderson made clear is that the camp would remain free of charge to the families. A further statement from the NHCS board is expected.

In other council news

Recent widely publicized objections to the formula determining how much towns must pay for OPP services were met by Bancroft pushback. Council passed a long resolution which essentially said: ?We paid too much for years, until we fought for a fairer system

? so leave the new formula alone.? Deputy Mayor Paul Jenkins said: ?We sympathize with municipalities facing increased costs. But we were overcharged, and we aren't getting any of that money back. In fact, we're still being overcharged, although at a decreasing rate.? CAO Hazel Lambe declared: ?Other municipalities are just putting the full OPP increase on their tax bill; Bancroft tightened its belt to keep tax rates down despite the overcharges, in order to reduce the burden on our taxpayers.?

McDougall Insurance let the town know that its rates were going up by 1.4 per cent ? rising from \$112,600 in annual premiums to \$114,100. Council agreed to new insurance against volunteers hurt while helping on municipal programs and events.

Fire chief Pat Hoover advised that because of new federal regulations, this year's Canada Day fireworks can't be held on the Station Street bridge. They will likely take place on the ridge above Foodland, or at the airport.

Council agreed to buy ten additional new breathing units for firefighters, at a cost of \$80,000. The money will come from the Fire Department reserves.