

Bancroft Council looks at speeding up business

By Tony Pearson

Bancroft Council took some time this week to celebrate community planning of the Bridge Street Bridge project and the York River boardwalk. Both were collaborations between the town and local merchants; both involved a significant amount of volunteer labour, and both were aimed at keeping the downtown area vibrant.

Apart from that, not a great deal of major business was on the agenda. Council did look at changing its meeting time to accommodate working residents who might like to attend, but can't because of job demands. However, this raised another issue when a 4 p.m. start, and even more so the 7 p.m. start used by many Eastern Ontario municipalities, was coupled with the current 6-7 hour running time of Council meetings, raising the potential for meetings stretching into the small hours of the following morning.

Accordingly, discussion switched to how meetings could be streamlined and their time significantly reduced. This will be investigated further. As if to show that meetings could be shortened, the remainder of the agenda was tackled with a fair amount of dispatch.

Council agreed to hold a town hall meeting in Bancroft on Tuesday, Nov. 17. They also voted to take back their previous approval of an expensive contract to close a cell at the waste-site, as some hope of a lower cost, or at least offsetting grants, had been glimpsed. They also approved a contract with "Museum Planning Partners" for a feasibility study and business plan for the proposed Earth Sciences Centre, and an agreement with the Rally of the Tall Pines. Asked about discussions with the Rally group on issues like downtown events and more local contracts, councillors learned that nothing new has been planned.

Council also decided not to let the North Hastings Economic Development Commission use the town credit card for "bridge financing" to buy time for some commercials on You Tube promoting the region. The Commission promised to repay the money from regional economic development grants. Despite this promise, the majority of council felt there was still a risk, as well as setting a possible precedent encouraging non-profit groups to apply for the use of town credit; Deputy Mayor Paul Jenkins and Councillor Bill Kilpatrick thought the request should have been granted.

Mayor Bernice Jenkins reported on moves by Quinte Health Care to cope with the cut in their provincial funding, which can affect operations at the Bancroft hospital (although QHC has stated that it will remain open and continue to provide 24-hour emergency care). Jenkins said that representatives of the four municipalities involved are working with the county warden on alternatives for funding hospitals in rural areas. She also declared that if the province wants less emphasis on hospital delivery of health services, they have to fund community health services better.

Deputy Mayor Paul (No Relation) Jenkins noted that despite assurances to the contrary, the quality of Bell service to Bancroft seems to lag behind other townships for example, in the installation of new switching equipment and fibre optics. Mayor Jenkins and CAO Lambe will try to bring all the players together for a discussion of what we have and don't have, and when we can expect improvements.