

Bancroft looks at new works yard

By Tony Pearson

Financial issues continue to dominate the proceedings of Bancroft town council. The town will soon have to decide whether to build a new public works yard, a project arising from an unexpected substantial increase in the fee paid to Ontario for the current yard. This fee just jumped by \$100,000 a year. Despite numerous promises from the provincial government for political representatives to look into the more than 400 per cent increase, the fee increase remains in place.

Bancroft will be looking at the feasibility of building a new works building at a cost of between \$900,000 and \$1.5 million, not counting land. Councillor Mary Kavanagh noted that before putting serious work into such an endeavour, a solution must first be found to the water/wastewater deficit.

On a smaller expense, the installation of a new heating system for the town office building, Councillor Charles Mullett presented an alternative to the \$100,000 furnace which council rejected at its last meeting. He noted last year's building committee suggestion that the former ambulance bays could be converted into office space or a council chamber. In that event, a smaller heating unit could be installed to provide in-floor heating. With the addition of proper insulation, Mullett felt the overall cost could be reduced, and ongoing heating bills lowered. Staff will look at the idea further.

The town also opted to forego some revenue. After months of suggestions from a number of councillors that North Hastings Children's Services (NHCS) be charged for the use of Millennium Park by young people from outside Bancroft attending their Experience Summer Camp, councillors now voted unanimously to provide the facility without charge.

NHCS had pointed out that the majority of kids and counsellors were from Bancroft, and that the camp promoted both the 'Healthy Communities' and community safety and well-being initiatives. Director Jessica Anderson stated: 'this free youth mentoring, employment, and recreation program will improve the social determinants of health of the participating families, which will advance the well-being of this wonderful community?'. In this regard, Mayor Bernice Jenkins used the term 'partnership' to describe the camp project, which NHCS took over from the town about a decade and a half ago.

Thanking the mayor and the town, Anderson echoed the partnership theme: 'Having the town provide Millennium Park for Experience Summer Camp, puts smiles on 250 to 300 local children in the North Hastings community every summer. That's a lot of memories that wouldn't be possible without the support of so many. Hastings County, NHCIA, CMHS, United Way of Quinte, OPP, R&L Bus Lines and many businesses, parents and camp counsellors all contribute to make every year a success. We are looking forward to planning 2017.'

A different type of financial request came from the Bancroft and District Chamber of Commerce. Noting that it owed the town over \$50,000 in back taxes, it asked that these debts be forgiven, or that the town give up its current right of first refusal of purchase, should the building be put up for sale. If the town gave up this right, board president Mike Daly suggested that the chamber would then be able to secure additional financing to pay the debt.

Mayor Jenkins stated that the letter made her think that the chamber was desperate. Council referred the matter to staff, who will look further at the mortgage and at grant requirements, and to the building committee, who will also look at other uses for the building should the chamber vacate it. The CAO will ask the chamber to disclose all conditions and undertakings with respect to the restored train station building. (Chamber representatives were unavailable for comment.)

Council also heard a request to complete the hard-top surfacing of Snow Road, beyond the treatment plant. They promised to look at this in the next capital budget.

Greenview Environment made a presentation on the town take-over the recycling process, which reiterated an expected reduction in town operating costs. Deputy Mayor Paul Jenkins reminded council that they had struck a committee to review all the figures, as well as the process by which the decision was made.

Further to town decision-making, council decided to defer consideration of new bylaw governing council procedures until councillors could give it more study 'especially after a recent presentation on desirable conduct by two consultants from Amberly Gavel. Nigel Bellchamber and Fred Dean spent a day with council going over 'musts' and 'shoulds' for town administration. Their comments will be compared to the proposed changes to the ways council and staff now function.