

Bancroft releases draft budget

By Tony Pearson

At last week's meeting of Bancroft town council, councillors got their first look at the draft 2017 budget. Actually, they looked at two budget proposals, both developed by town staff. According to acting treasurer Arthur Smith, the first represented 'what administration feels is needed to meet the current expectations and service levels for the town.' The price tag for this budget was given as a 14 per cent tax increase.

Smith also tabled a second budget, which worked with the maximum two per cent tax increase council had set earlier as a target. He described this budget as requiring 'drastic cuts' to town programs.

'These cuts will have an impact on services provided, as projects may need to be cut in order to meet the budget,' said Smith.

Unfortunately, in both budgets, there appeared to be more questions than answers - for example, the size of the town's surplus for 2016. The good news is that it is at least \$260,000, and might be significantly higher, depending on how the town pays for upgrades made to the Dungannon landfill. But as previously reported, as a result of an assessment appeal, the town owes Canadian Tire about \$130,000, and has plans to set aside another \$200,000 for further back-tax settlements with large chain stores. The town also intends to transfer \$300,000 to stop the sewer deficit from rising further out of control.

The biggest difference between the two per cent and the 14 per cent budget proposals came in the roads department.

Works manager Perry Kelly would like to spend \$350,000 on road upgrades, including \$220,000 on Detlor Road, and \$80,000 extending the paving on Snow Road beyond the water plant. He would also like to get more gravel for road repair crushed and stockpiled. In all, the desired roads budget would see operational spending increase by nearly \$200,000 more than what was spent last year. That overall budget increase for roads would amount to over half a million dollars in the 14 per cent tax increase option.

The other big area of increase is in the town administration budget, where staff is showed total operational spending in 2017 at over half a million dollars more than last year. About \$200,000 of this increase was simply labelled 'Other;?' treasurer Smith promised to get it identified before the next budget meeting. The admin upper level proposal also calls for \$100,000 more for wages and benefits, and \$60,000 more for contract services.

On the other hand, council costs won't grow, as councillors earlier turned down a potential pay increase. Council grants to community groups have also been cut, from \$30,000 last year to \$2,000 this year.

Building and bylaw costs, and fire service costs, will not grow either. In the case of the fire department, the only equipment purchase planned is a new tanker chassis, and half of its \$40,000 expense is coming from funds raised by the firefighters themselves.

OPP policing fees see the final year of reductions under the new formula which Bancroft lobbied hard for, with about \$80,000 less charged than last year.

Finally, some increases are proposed for the remaining departments. Waste collection foresees \$80,000 more on operating costs, although the source of the increase was not clearly identified. In capital spending, there are apparently some remaining charges for the purchase of the used garbage and recycling trucks; in all, \$120,000 of capital expenses is forecast in the 14 per cent tax increase budget, and \$70,000 in the two per cent option.

In the planning department, there's a new employee proposed, although this is offset by a reduction in contract services, and a slashing of grants allocations. A loss of revenue over last year means that the overall net expenses are projected for a \$60,000 (33 per cent increase).

Finally, recreation services suggests a net increase of between \$95,000 and \$120,000, depending on the option chosen. The big increase is in contractual services; modest increases have also been suggested for the library and for some improvements to Millennium Park. In addition, a new furnace is needed at Club 580 (the existing furnace gave out a couple of weeks ago).

Staff will bring back revised figures and answers to outstanding questions at the next council meeting on May 9. After that, there will be a public meeting on the evening of Tuesday, May 16, where the public is invited to get briefed and ask their own questions. The following day, council will decide on the level of taxation increase to levy for 2017 - whether it be the council-requested two or the staff-recommended 14 per cent, or something in between.

Arena roof in progress, fees increase

In other business, council learned that the new roof is now going on the arena, and that ice rental fees are going up by \$20 an hour (it was noted that North Hastings had one of the few financially self-sustaining small town arenas in the province).

New area initiatives on the way

Council also learned of several community safety and wellbeing initiatives: an anti-littering campaign by the Bancroft Area Stewardship Council, a new campaign against impaired driving (including of ATVs), and an upcoming public information seminar

on dealing with Fentanyl abuse.

Mail-in voting gets green light

Finally, council approved the use of the current mail-in voting system in the next municipal election.