

Bancroft to consider new uses for its buildings

By Tony Pearson

Bancroft councillors Charles Mullett and Barry McGibbon combined a recent inspection of the state of various township properties with some brainstorming about how they could be more efficiently used, and came up with a number of original suggestions, which they presented to Bancroft's committee of the whole last week.

Mullett reported that the inspection was first carried out in 2013. Mayor Bernice Jenkins thought the new council should have an update, so that they and the public are fully aware of what the township owns, and what state it's in. But prompted by the knowledge that the town office needs a new heating system, they decided to spur some thinking about better uses for the properties they own.

For example, they noted that the library, which is on two levels with the main entrance on a third, is not wheelchair accessible, whereas Club 580, on one level, is. They thus suggested that the library move to the 580, while the Bancroft Seniors use the Dungannon Rec Centre, already the home of the Shamrock Seniors, as their space as well. The library could then be sold and the funds used to upgrade existing facilities ? including better heating for Club 580 and the town office building.

Meanwhile Bancroft council could move into the town office building, as the three garage bays now employed for miscellaneous storage could be converted into council chambers, with a new accessible washroom. In addition, the caboose now sitting at the old Station building could be moved beside the museum and turned into a tourist information centre.

Mayor Jenkins noted that this was just the very first stage of considering changes to township accommodations. ?You've given us a lot to think about,? she told Mullett and McGibbon, adding that further discussion was needed at committee level. She later commented in writing that: ?Taking into consideration the potential impacts to service delivery, community needs, and the town budget ? we will continue to assess cost saving measures and communicate our findings to the public.? There are also cost implications ? such as whether Club 580's foundations would need reinforcement to carry the weight of the library's books.

One immediate new building expense caused a fair degree of budget shock ? the decision by the province, which owns the town's public works yard, to move to market value and increase the rent from \$30,000 a year to \$130,000, starting in December.

Apparently it could have been worse; CAO Hazel Lambe indicated that the initial rent demand was substantially higher. But given that the operating surpluses for 2014 and 2015 are well below this \$100,000 new expense, the implications are still very significant. The town had inquired about buying the property, but the province isn't currently interested in selling it. Bancroft will, however, be allowed to sublet, and one new tenant has been found.

Longer term, the town is also considering moving the yard to Dungannon (Detlor Road), since the new lease has a four month escape clause. As for the current sticker shock, the mayor promised to seek assistance from MPP Todd Smith.

Chief building official Dale Shannick finally brought some good news when he reported that so far this year, the value of new construction was just about double what it was at this time last year; in consequence, building fee revenue has gone from about \$22,000 to over \$50,000.

On another budget matter, treasurer Craig Davidson got approval to seek funds from the province's infrastructure fund for the proposed new Snow Road water main. If successful, the town would still have to find \$200,000 as its share of the \$2 million net cost. If the application is successful, the town will have to keep a close eye on it, as they would have to pay the full cost of overruns should the project go over budget.