

CAO Lambe outlines strategic analysis

By Tony Pearson

Bancroft Township Chief Administrative Officer Hazel Lambe presented a SWOT analysis to town council's Committee of the Whole last week - an analysis of Bancroft's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, to be taken into account as the town prepares its financial plans for 2015. Lambe led off with a statement that Bancroft's finances are no better or worse off than other Hastings County and Eastern Ontario towns. Nonetheless, she identified debt management and reduction as a priority, along with the promotion of development that would attract new investment without increasing long-term cost. She noted a number of themes that have been repeatedly stressed, such as the need for more provincial and federal funding.

She also emphasized the need for partnerships, both with community organizations and with other municipalities. Her report noted that over 90 per cent of Ontario municipalities share some services, from purchasing to libraries to waste management. Lambe laid special emphasis on the potential for joint economic development planning, including joint marketing of local attractions as well as the promotion of local entrepreneurs and the development or recruitment of new ones.

Another component of healthy development which the CAO identified was the setting of measurable long-term goals as part of the budget process, such as on debt reduction and assessment growth. As for specific plans, she noted regional mapping, website overhaul, more use of social media, liberalized zoning for second dwellings, and the Earth Centre; she also suggested a regular round table bringing together business owners and township officials.

One immediate recommendation with which Council concurred was putting a moratorium on parking space charges to businesses. Further on downtown development, the CAO and treasurer have reviewed plans for the proposed boardwalk; decisions will need to be made as to whether the town should acquire river property if agreements can't be reached with current property owners.

One decision Council stuck to was not to give a requested tax abatement to the Bancroft Family Health Team for the new building in which they are housed. Deputy Mayor Paul Jenkins, who is on the board of the health team, urged more consideration of incentives for health providers, including the BFHT private sector fee-for-service physicians. On the other hand, Mayor Bernice Jenkins noted that the town had contributed quite a bit of money to attract medical students to Bancroft practice. Councillor Charles Mullet further noted that the doctors are not the owners of their building, and the town of Bancroft can't afford to give special tax breaks. When Councillor Paul Jenkins objected to the tone of the draft letter rejecting the tax-break request on legal grounds, finding it 'harsh' and 'terse', Treasurer Craig Davidson observed that the town can't constantly make exceptions and retroactive deals without harming itself.

On other issues, Public Works Director Perry Kelly reported that planning for Phase II of the landfill would likely be done by town staff rather than hiring a consultant. He is also looking at having the town carry out its recycling, instead of contracting it out again. He also wanted to set targets for replacement of town assets and infrastructure. In terms of current assets, the Works department will spend between \$15,000 and \$25,000 on repairs to its grader; Kelly felt the grader has lots of life left, and this repair would avoid having to spend \$340,000 on a new machine. As well, the department hopes to increase its preventive maintenance budget to prolong the life of its major equipment.

After a letter of complaint about road collapse, Kelly has been asked for a report on repairs to York River Drive. The Works Department is also carrying on its plans for repairs to Pinnacle Road, and whether it needs just a new base or full paving.

Planning is well in hand for this July's Wheels Water & Wings festival; yet to be determined is the extent of the beer tent area, and the best method of controlling music volume. As for Canada Day celebrations, the town remains committed to the fireworks display, although they still have no word on their grant application to partially offset the approximately \$10,000 cost. Also to be determined are the best places for viewing and detonation. Sponsorship is being sought for the climbing wall and bouncy castle attractions. Meanwhile, tickets for Smash Wrestling are now available, and ads are starting. The wrestling troupe is also in contact with area schools.