

Finding a renewed commitment to growth

By Jake Storey

Acting Mayor Paul Jenkins recently attended an Ontario Small Urban Municipalities conference with the aim of helping small municipalities develop strategies for growth.

OSUM is a part of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario and the two groups share multiple Board members. This was the first conference of this sort that Jenkins has attended and he stated that there were representatives from as far as Thunder Bay and all the way down to the Southern edges of Ontario.

As the name implies, this means smaller towns that fulfill an urban role. Bancroft acts as an urban hub, despite being located in a rural area. It provides a variety of services to support the commercial sector that everyone in the area, including the surrounding, smaller communities, uses.

It brings lots of challenges, mainly being the cost of providing these services, which can be expensive to the residents in the town of Bancroft, said Jenkins. All of the outlying areas, they do get the benefit of it but the hub towns are left picking up the costs. So it's looking at the challenges of that and basically putting forth some ideas that could spur growth. Really, the only way we have for increased revenue right now is through growth in order to increase our tax base.

What the speakers at the OSUM conference do is address problems faced by these small, hub municipalities. An example brought up by Jenkins is the water and sewage issue we're currently facing here in Bancroft, as well as some big changes to provincial legislation that are currently incoming.

If you're in a big municipality with a big staff, it's much easier to grapple with all of this stuff. But if you're in a small municipality, there are a lot of challenges. So what they try to do is educate you as much as they can at these meetings as to what's going on and what's coming. They try to show you by example what you can do to move forward and attract growth.

Attracting growth was a major focal point of Jenkins' takeaway from the event. I think what it did was it confirmed all of the previous thoughts that I had, on what we need to do to move forward. It basically has worked its way into the budget. The title of our 2017 budget is, Progress Through Growth. We've talked about it for years, we've dabbled here and there but we've never made a real, all-out concerted effort, he added.

As for what he intends to do to make this happen, he says there are plans in place to create a committee in order to further focus this goal. Currently named the Community Development Committee, it is set to be headed up by Councillor Mary Kavanaugh, pending council approval. The committee is to develop a strategic plan for growth going forward.

Don't get me wrong, we're doing a lot of these things right now, said Jenkins. We just haven't fully implemented it and brought it all together.