

Full boardwalk balked

By Tony Pearson

Bancroft has a riverside boardwalk that extends from Bridge Street to Station Street ? almost.

The distance along the east side of the York River in the downtown is about 2,300 feet or 700 metres.

The board walk covers 2,000 feet or 610 metres. But that leaves a 300 feet or 90 metre gap.

Before the boardwalk began, all but one of the property owners agreed to allow the boardwalk on their property. The hold-out has been joined by a second property owner having second thoughts, although the boardwalk builders and the town claim to have answered all his questions and concerns.

Last week, the volunteer committee leaders came to Bancroft council committee of the whole to report, make recommendations, and correct misconceptions about the project. Thus, they noted that the boardwalk isn't a town endeavour, but a volunteer initiative, whose entire \$280,000 cost has been raised without Bancroft tax funds. The group made a successful application for an \$88,000 Trillium grant, and the rest came from donations of money, materials, and labour by community members.

The committee, led by Burke Chamberlin, would like to see the project completed, as would the property owners who now host the boardwalk. The feeling is that the boardwalk is a catalyst for downtown development. To further this goal, the committee would like to see archways at either end, with the length landscaped and adorned with artwork, gardens, and historical plaques, and amenities such as benches. They can also see docks installed to create riverfront activity, which in turn might spur more businesses to open.

Nonetheless, a number of councillors were worried about infringing the rights of the hold-out property owners ? even if their property were bypassed by boardwalk extension to take it out over the river. Councillor Barry McGibbon expressed his belief in the absolute right of an owner to use and enjoy their property as they wanted, and felt that the community was unfairly harassing the hold-outs.

?When they're ready, they'll agree ? but don't push them,? he advised.

In reply, Chamberlin stated that the volunteer group had never recommended expropriation, as some members of the public have suggested. Rather, they hoped that the town would encourage all property owners to see the merits of a waterfront development.

The group noted that they remained in communication with the two hold-outs but had been unable to capture their imagination.

While they conceded their right to have final say, the boardwalk group hoped the town would join their efforts at persuasion.

Councillor Bill Kilpatrick has previously moved a motion that: the Town of Bancroft lend its full support to the downtown boardwalk initiative ? and further the town send out formal letters to the land owners who are refusing to allow the boardwalk to cross their property, requesting clarification of their position and ask that they reconsider, as allowing the boardwalk to remain incomplete and deteriorate reflects poorly on the town's revitalization efforts, and denies residents and visitors alike a unique experience by the York River. Council decided to defer this motion until September to allow for the development of alternatives.

Bancroft council also continued to wrestle with issues arising from its new no free ride policy on use of town facilities. When the Bancroft Theatre Guild requested that town charges for the Millennium Park bandstand and Club 580 be waived for its free public performance of the 24 hour theatre, the majority of councillors Charles Mullet, Mary Kavanagh, Barry McGibbon and Tracy McGibbon voted to refuse the request. Mullett noted that facility upkeep requires money, and Barry McGibbon stated that the theatre was well established and should be able to afford such fees.

However, when a similar request was brought forward from the Mineral Capital Concert series, which stages free concerts in the park on summer Wednesdays, the result was different. Although Kavanagh stated that the town shouldn't give community organizations something for nothing, and Barry McGibbon said that the concert organizers could ask for donations or seek sponsorships, Mullett felt that some requests could be allowed on grounds of economic development. In the end, council decided to allow the series free use this year, with rent charged next year.

In other areas council endorsed Rev. Lynn Watson's plan to have sponsored prayer flags across the York between Labour Day and Thanksgiving, with revenue split between St. Paul's and Social Justice Without Borders. Councillor Paul Jenkins wanted a prayer flag to ask for the elimination of the sewer deficit.

Staff will look at a complaint from Bancroft Taxi about unfair town bylaws favouring not-for-profit transport services such as Bancroft Community Transit.

Staff was also asked to look into improving the heating and air conditioning systems at the Dungannon Rec Centre.

Council unanimously agreed with Kilpatrick's motion to begin planning to replace OCWA's contract for wastewater processing.

Also, CAO Hazel Lambe reported that council would soon receive a bylaw to extend the town's line of credit.