

NHHS principal says students are 'couch-surfing'?

By Jim Eadie

The following are brief reports of items discussed at the April 25 meeting of Bancroft's community safety and well-being committee.

The committee discussed the ongoing homelessness study underway in Hastings County, including the Bancroft area.

'We are aware people also live in housing that is in very unsafe conditions,' said CAO Hazel Lambe. 'They will be missed in the survey.'

'Here we have seen no issue of people sleeping on the streets,' said OPP Const. Philippe Regamey. 'We see house surfing, living in a vehicle, living in rundown houses, sheds or hunting camps? heating with wood, with no water or sewage. I attended the first meeting. If you have a roof over your head, you may not be captured in the survey. We will be getting results in June.'

'We have a number of students couch-surfing,' said North Hastings High School principal Wayne Stewart. 'It is a very unstable environment to live in. Ten to 15 per cent of students at the school at any one given time are not living at home.'

'We have seen people here who pay rent, have a place to stay, but [are] not safe,' said Lambe.

Committee members put forward a recommendation to council that its concerns that people living in precarious or unsafe environments housing be included in the survey if possible.

New permanent OPP Staff Sergeant arrives in June

Bancroft OPP's interim detachment commander, Insp. Joe Evans presented a detachment update to the committee.

'I know there have been a lot of acting detachment commanders coming through here,' he said. 'It has been hard on the staff as well. Now that amalgamation with Madoc detachment has been tabled, applications to fill the position permanently in Bancroft will be decided by June. Interviews of the short list will begin next week.'

'The troops really need someone here,' said Deputy Mayor Charles Mullett.

'We have a great working relationship with the OPP,' said Mayor Paul Jenkins. 'We know the officers... we hear what they say. They are not complaining but making observations. We have a good relationship with your officers ? never any concern about their work and dedication.'

'The community needs consistency, and so does the staff,' said Evans. 'I have told senior staff that you need someone who is part of the community, engaged, and supports the Bancroft area.'

'I sent a letter to the commissioner ? about the revolving door here,' said Mullett. 'I have been told by the commissioner that I will be on the selection committee, along with Hastings Highlands Deputy Mayor [Gregg] Roberts. He also chairs BACPAC (Bancroft Area Community Police Advisory Committee).'

Evans also noted that prisoner escorts cost a lot of money and time. He said they're working out a sharing arrangement with Madoc OPP. 'There are a lot of balls in the air right now,' he said.

Ontario to mandate safety committees

All municipalities in Ontario by next year will be required to have a community health and well-being committee. The Town of Bancroft was out of the chute very early and established its committee several years ago. The surrounding municipalities have now indicated an interest in establishing one regional committee serving their municipalities.

'All CAOs and Dr. Hugh Russell are supportive of a regional plan,' said Lambe. 'Each municipality will identify their risks and prepare a stand-alone plan. I don't think the OPP would be expected to attend meetings at each municipality ? it will be evolving.'

'Is this a regional committee for all, or will Bancroft be separate??' asked Mullett.

'There would be the regional component, and then each municipality would have their own plan,' said Lambe. 'Would there then be a need for BACPAC? I wouldn't think so. There are still a lot of unanswered questions.'

'A regional plan is great,' said Councillor Wayne Wiggins. 'They could meet quarterly. I would still like to see this committee continue.'

'Me too,' said Mullett. 'A lot of very good work is getting done here ? I would like it to continue.'