

OCWA out, town signs with Veolia



By Nate Smelle

Veolia Water Canada Inc. will now officially be taking over the Town of Bancroft's water and wastewater system as of Jan. 1, 2018. The company signed a five-year contract with the town at a special meeting of council held on Tuesday, Oct. 24. Veolia's vice president of Canadian operations Mark Rupke and its project manager for Bancroft Duane Forth were on hand at the meeting to sign the deal and provide insight on Veolia and how they plan to handle the transition.

Veolia manages 558 facilities in North America, and employs hundreds of thousands of employees around the world. Rupke joked that they are one of "the biggest companies in the world that nobody's ever heard of." Pointing out that nearly all the facilities Veolia manages in North America were taken over from other operators, Rupke is confident that the transition in Bancroft will go smoothly. "Transitioning staff and transitioning facilities is second nature for us," he said.

Rupke indicated that Veolia has a transition plan in place that they have been working on since they began putting together their proposal. The transition plan consists of 322 different detailed items – administration, hiring staff, health and safety, establishing suppliers, etc. – that need to be addressed by the company before the transition period wraps up on March 1, 2018. Rupke said that Veolia is sending two health and safety representatives from the corporate office in the U.S. to Bancroft on Nov. 6 and Nov. 7 to perform an initial assessment of the plant.

"Between now and Jan. 1 we have plenty of time to get ready," said Rupke.

"Our normal MO when we move into a facility is that once we have the contract, within a few weeks we're ready to go."

"What this tells you is that we have the experience and we have the resources required to operate your system," added Forth.

Acting mayor Paul Jenkins expressed that he was very happy with the new contract and that he was glad that the process was over so that the town could begin moving forward with the transition. According to Jenkins, the new contract offers several advantages compared to the previous arrangement with the Ontario Clean Water Association (OCWA).

"For starters, it's \$300,000 less a year with the same high-quality service," he said.

"What's new with this contract is that it gives us the ability to cross train our own staff, which is very important. Just in case down the road we decide we want to take on the plant ourselves, after this contract we'll be able to train our own staff to do so. That's not saying you're going to do that, but it's an option we built into it."

Under the new contract, Jenkins said the town will now have instantaneous and remote access to operating data. This feature has the potential to create even more savings for the town, he said, because by closely monitoring this data they have a better chance of finding ways to improve the efficiency of the system.

"There's a lot of advantages in this contract. Many of these things we would have achieved through any of the three operators that we chose, but this is the one we got at the lowest cost that achieves all our objectives."

Chair of the water and wastewater committee, Councillor Bill Kilpatrick is also enthusiastic about the new contract with Veolia; not only because of the savings it brings, but because he is hopeful the town will be able to build a new relationship based on transparency, effective communication, and mutual respect.

"Veolia has shown a willingness to be not only constantly looking for shared savings, but a willingness to pass those savings on to

their customers,? he said.

?Given the fact that we as a municipality are facing ever greater financial challenges, we need a company that will ensure that our water and wastewater systems are run effectively, efficiently while maximizing affordability. Although the contract has not begun as of yet, I'm very hopeful, given what I've seen so far, that our partnership with Veolia will continue to bring savings and high-quality service moving forward. That's exactly what the people of Bancroft deserve.?