

Petition to ensure council doesn't dump its dump

By Tony Pearson

Wilma Brethour has lived in Bancroft's Dungannon Ward for more than 30 years. She is fiercely attached to the Dungannon landfill. She doesn't want it sold, leased, or used to take in other towns' waste.

When she heard Councillor Charles Mullett's motion to prevent the sale of the landfill had been defeated, she decided to take action. She started to circulate petitions, and to encourage people to write letters. As of the Feb. 25 weekend she had 155 signatures on the petition with at least 15 signature sheets still circulating around town. She also had over 20 letters in her possession. She's expecting 20 more (some sent their letters directly to the town office).

The petition, entitled *Not In My Backyard*, states: "We want our dump for the use of the residents of Bancroft and only the residents of Bancroft, now and into the future. We the undersigned petition the council of the Town of Bancroft to (a) not sell the landfill site in Dungannon; (b) not lease the land to a [third] party; (c) not allow the landfill site in Dungannon to be used to bring in garbage or recycling from other regions outside of the Town of Bancroft even as a recycling depot. We don't want their garbage or recycling in our backyard."

At Bancroft's last council meeting, Mayor Bernice Jenkins identified various possibilities for generating revenue from the landfill: its sale, leasing it out, or accepting garbage and/or recycling from other municipalities "either restricted to neighbouring townships, or opening it to all interested municipalities.

Mayor Jenkins has also noted that the landfill could become much more of a cost burden on the town if a new assessment is imposed. Currently, the landfill's worth is given as \$500,000, and it is on that basis that the town pays its rate to the county and the school boards. However, the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC) now says it is worth \$5 million. If this assessment were implemented, the town's payments would have to increase dramatically.

The new MPAC assessment also triggered speculation about its revenue potential "revenue the town now desperately needs because of the growing sewer deficit, over \$2 million. A recent decision to double sewer rates will halt the growth of the debt, but not roll it back. The amount owing gets added to existing town debt, to send it over \$8 million.

The idea of selling the landfill was first floated by Deputy Mayor Paul Jenkins. He declared that he isn't wedded to the idea, but feels it needs to be explored.

"I'm uncertain if it is the best way to solve our financial situation, as no analysis has been done as to its value or how we could safeguard the best interests of the municipality. We would be remiss in our role as a council not to explore the options."

The same note was sounded by Dungannon Councillor Bill Kilpatrick: "We need to look at the evidence. Everyone's taxes are affected by the sewer debt. If we don't deal with it soon, we could face a massive reduction of services."

"We must undertake our 'due diligence', and make a rational decision based on the total overall impact on town finances," added the mayor.

Deputy Mayor Jenkins looked at the impact on town development: "We can choose to continually add to our uncompetitive taxation structure, or we can find additional sources of revenue. We should also do everything possible to facilitate growth, as this would increase our tax base. We have many people who struggle to pay our high taxes and water/wastewater rates. We need to look after the interests of all residents to bring these rates down."

Brethour noted that the water and sewer system serves only Bancroft Ward, and is supposed to be "user-pay." She is also sceptical of council's track record in managing town assets. She has asked to make a presentation to the next meeting of council, scheduled for March 14.