

Sustainable Bancroft plan 'alive and well,' says CAO Lambe



By Nate Smelle

When Bancroft Council announced which councillors would be chairing each of the committees many were surprised not to see anyone appointed to the Community Sustainable Planning Committee (CSPC). Since Council's decision to amalgamate the CSPC with the committee of the whole concerns have been raised regarding what will happen to the work of the committee.

One of the main initiatives developed by the committee over the last four years that is the Integrated Community Sustainability Plan (ICSP). Although the CSPC technically no longer exists, Bancroft's Mayor Bernice Jenkins assured that the sustainability plan would remain a priority of the new Council moving forward.

'I am committed to keeping the Sustainable Bancroft Plan in front of council and I am sure it will continue to play a part in our decision making,' said Jenkins.

Bancroft's CAO Hazel Lambe also claims 'the plan is alive and well.' She believes that by bringing the ICSP to the operational level it will enhance and strengthen the work that has already been done by the CSPC.

'It is a town plan and the committee from the beginning developed an exceptional community sustainability plan,' said Lambe.

'Over the years the committee has done a great job but to fully fulfill what the plan was designed to accomplish it needs to become a part of all decision making at every level within our operations. That being said Council and department managers are responsible to ensure we continue to implement sustainability for the town.'

Lambe said that Council now intends to keep track of the implementation of the ICSP by reviewing monthly reports regarding operational practises and how they relate to the plan.

Former councillor and chair of the CSPC Don Koppin is confident that Bancroft can easily make the Town's operations sustainable by working within the organization. Just because the town may be moving towards a more sustainable way of operating Koppin said it does not mean that the greater community therefore also becomes sustainable.

'Then it is an island within the community that is sustainable, which does not actually make it sustainable since the surrounding community is not sustainable,' said Koppin.

'But the Town cannot legislate sustainability for the community. The Town can only educate and lead the community towards

sustainability. For true sustainability, everyone has to work together to develop the four pillars [environmental, social, cultural and economic]. This is the really hard part, because for the Town of Bancroft to become truly sustainable, North Hastings has to be growing and developing along with the Town.?

All things considered, Koppin believes at this time that the decision will not make Bancroft any less sustainable. In the next few months he expects that the new council will determine how it is going to approach the implementation of the ICSP and how it will carry on the legacy of the CSPC. In spite of his concerns for the continuation of the committee's work in helping to create a sustainable community, he remains optimistic.

?The community has done very well at undertaking sustainable actions on their own,? said Koppin, ?however, I do believe that some of this will be lost if there is not someone or some committee documenting these actions and keeping the community and council aware of all of the actions that fit into the plan and how many of them are being accomplished. I believe that we will lose a great deal of momentum on being sustainable if the new council does not work actively with all four pillars of the community to promote the concept of a sustainable future.?

One of the main objectives of the CSPC for 2015, he said was to start promoting increased support for The Rural Overland Utility Transit (TROUT). Although Bancroft already supports public transit, he said TROUT is in danger of not having enough financial support to continue to operate.

Koppin said the committee viewed TROUT as a unique transit model, custom-created for this area. They also saw the service as essential in helping to encourage truly sustainable economic development throughout the community.

?It plays a big role in economic development and sustainability to our region,? he continued. ?Due to our belief in sustainable economic development, the committee promoted increased support for the TROUT.?

Originally designed to be a strong starting point for Bancroft to move towards a sustainable future, the ICSP brought together the ideas of 40 volunteers who live and work in the community. One of the criticisms of this decision is that since the committee of the whole consists only of councillors the public will no longer be able to contribute to making the municipality more sustainable.

As chair of the finance and growth committee, and as a former member of the CSPC, Councillor Paul Jenkins said that this is not the intent. Instead he sees opportunities in the restructuring of the CSPC.

?The Town is committed to continue integrating the sustainable process in all of their operations,? said Jenkins.

?The discussion will now focus on how best to integrate the community into the process and possibly identify specific projects to capture the public's interest. Once this is sorted out I expect to see the committee back in action with broad based public involvement.?

For Jenkins sustainability is more a way of life than just an environmental ideal. He considers the ICSP an excellent vehicle to move the community forward.

?Everybody views sustainability as just environmental, but that is just one part of it,? he said.

?You could spin off on a health care wing of it, you could spin off on a community planning wing of it. We want to see where it will best fit and how it can be the most effective. Its future direction will have to be sorted out by the current Council before we move forward.?

Without a committee focussed solely on sustainability, moving forward in a way that encourages sustainable development and prosperity is going to require an active participation by the public.

?Yes we're going to integrate it into our day-to-day operations, but now we have to step outside that and look to the next big thing and where we want to be as a community,? said Jenkins.

?We have to get the community involved, we can't just decide that as a Council, we have to get the input from the community to decide what it is that we really want, and how we go about getting it.?