

Town drafting new wastewater report

Some residents keep taps flowing in winter to prevent freezing pipes

By Sarah Sobanski

More than 30 Bancroft residents ran their water in a stream the thickness of a pencil over the course of this winter to stop their pipes from freezing, according to the town's CAO Hazel Lambe. It's a problem she suggests dates back approximately 30 years.

Mayor Paul Jenkins accepts that this water contributes directly to wastewater where the town has been focusing its efforts to find where excess wastewater is contributed to the sewer plant to reduce its costs. He says the extra flow contributed by those running their water however, is very small.

While having people run their taps is definitely a desirable fix for the freezing pipe issue, the contribution to the overall excess water being processed at the wastewater treatment plant is very small. That represents a very small component of it, he said. He suggested fixing the problem would be more costly than to leave it alone for now. The town currently compensates those running their water. Fixing the pipe lines, he said, could fall onto the backs of the property owners.

It's potentially very costly depending on the location and more importantly, people need to realise, the freeze ups might be on the property owner's side. If that was the case... it would be the property owners responsibility to fix it, not the town's.

A retired single woman living in one of these 30 homes however, says there's more to the problem than looking after the leaks. She says she's been waiting for the town to fix her pipes for some time. She's uncomfortable leaving her house with a tap constantly running, but more than that, she estimates she's contributing 10 times the wastewater she would normally to the sewer plant.

I feel like a hostage in the winter time. You wouldn't go away and leave your tap running in the basement, I don't feel like I can do that either? I'm retired, or I'm supposed to be retired which is why I'm angry, Peggy Maxwell told *Bancroft This Week*.

Maxwell was instructed by the town to run her water from the end of November of last year to the end of April this year. Her sister, who she says also has to run her water, stood up at Bancroft's public budget meeting earlier this month to ask the mayor to fix one set of pipes at a time.

You can do the math, Maxwell said multiplying her consumption by the number of people running their water.

Before Bancroft's May 11 meeting, when the paper spoke to Maxwell, the rumour was more than 60 people were running their water all winter.

Lambe said in an email to the paper the reasons the pipes freeze varies from depth of buried infrastructure, lack of insulation where pipe enters the home, lack of sufficient heat inside the home (basement) are all factors.

The town quantifies how much water is used for line freezing prevention, Lambe wrote when the paper asked how much wastewater was being contributed to the sewer plant due to the homes that must run their water. A report is being completed that will be presented to the water and wastewater committee in May.

She added, Staff are working on an information launch that will explain public/private water lines and preventions that can be initiated and maintained by the private property owner to mitigate against water lines freezing. This information is a compilation of best practices from municipalities that have the same problem such as Kingston, St. Catharines, Port Colborne, Blue Mountains and the City of Toronto.

Maxwell said she was pretty sure her taps would freeze if she didn't run her taps.

They [the town] don't like that I kick up a stink about this. They just want me to shut up and I am not going to shut up, she said. I know the town is broke and there's no money for anything? But they just ignore me now.

Jenkins said his pipes had only frozen once in the 20 years he'd lived in Bancroft. He said he chose not to run his water and noted the matter wasn't as easy as fixing pipes in the ground. He said in some places there would need to be major road repairs to get to the faulty pipes and the solution could be very, very expensive.

These are all the things that we need to go back and [have] reassessed, he said noting the town was looking into the situation.

With respect to water, we need to look at how much water is leaving the water plant and how much are we actually billing for that, but right now you can't line those two up because of the way we currently record meters, he added.

Council's water and wastewater committee heard a pitch for a new smart meter system at its last meeting from Al Hough from CORIX water products. The system would use data collection from current home water consumption meters via a cellular tower system, avoiding the costs of new towers, radio links, and all of the associated maintenance costs.

With files from Jim Eadie