

Water Rates TOWN HALL Report



The Water Rates Town Hall / March 1, 2017

Sponsored by concerned citizens and the following groups: The Gnomes for Justice & Equality / North Hastings Chapter, Bancroft Dollar Store Plus, Maggie's, North Hastings Community Trust, A Place for the Arts, The Partista, Life House, Deuce Tattoos, Métis Nation.

Water Rates Town Hall REPORT

Community Meeting held March 1, 2017, The Legion, Bancroft, Ontario

This Report has been prepared by a volunteer Town Hall Planning Committee

Media Release Event: March 31, 2017

Democracy isn't a spectator sport.
If we don't participate,
it ceases to be a democracy.

Michael Moore

SUMMARY

*At the beginning of 2017, the Town Council of Bancroft substantially raised the rates citizens must pay for the clean water they use and the wastewater they send to treatment. This Report provides information gathered at a Town Hall-style community meeting held on March 1, 2017 at the Bancroft Legion. Between **100 and 120 concerned citizens** came together to address the issue of the large increase in water/wastewater rates. People discussed the impact of the rate increase on themselves and their community and sought solutions and actions that could be taken. There was a sense of urgency. Many people felt they could not hold out for long paying bills this high. All but a very few people attending the meeting are convinced:*

THE BANCROFT WATER/WASTEWATER RATES MUST BE ROLLED BACK.



PART 1 INTRODUCTION

The concerned citizens who came to the Water Rates Town Hall were aware that the combined 53% increase in the rates indeed had the potential to shut down businesses, community agencies, and create a harsher reality for people already struggling to pay bills and put food on the table. These new costs were seen as coming on top of increasingly high costs for electricity, creating a sense of crisis. North Hastings has one of the highest rates of poverty in the province. We have little income and financial resources among us.

But what we do have is a powerful number of people committed to creating a healthy community, to supporting each other, and to finding creative solutions together. The Town Hall demonstrated the capacity the Town of Bancroft has to be resilient and to work together.

Following an abundant community meal, the planners of the meeting made brief presentations to facilitate discussion: a time line of water system events and a document titled ***Ten Key Things to Know about the Bancroft Water Situation*** (see attached Appendix). Then 12 small groups were formed from the 100+ people present. A facilitator in each group encouraged people to share their thoughts in response to two questions. **First: how are you and our community impacted by this rate increase? Secondly, what can we do together to solve this crisis?** The conversations that followed produced evidence of the profound impact this rate increase will have on our lives, and also identified concrete steps we can take to reverse the 53% increase. We shared stories of survival, our commitment to place and home and our love of our community.

During the Town Hall, we shared food, music, ideas and humour. We concluded the event with a commitment to keep going ... to report back to our community the evidence and ideas presented. And a promise to continue to bring people together to work towards the answers that will solve this crisis.

We ended with music! Dancing! A few back flips! And hope.



Why was this Town Hall held?

The planners of this Town Hall are friends and neighbours who would like to help build up the capacity of our community to deal with serious issues. We recognized the enormous impact that the rate increases would be having on life in our community. We heard people talking about how angry and discouraged they felt. We became concerned that on top of all of the current struggles to meet basic needs, people would feel deeply threatened by the rising cost of essential utilities. The only way we know through this kind of stress is to bring people together to find solutions. In community people can learn how to support each other, and cultivate a movement of people that can take this on.

We committed to creating an event that would foster collaboration and community participation. We knew food was important, music, and the creation of an atmosphere that despite the hard task ahead, could be experienced as comfortable, supportive and encouraging. We wanted to foster hope.

This process was supported by many people — a kitchen crew, event planners, researchers, facilitators, moderators and story-tellers. We are cooks, artists, musicians, politicians, community workers and most importantly: ordinary people who care deeply about our community.

The Water Rates Town Hall was sponsored by concerned citizens and the following groups: The Gnomes for Justice & Equality / North Hastings Chapter, Bancroft Dollar Store Plus, Maggie's, North Hastings Community Trust, A Place for the Arts, The Partista, Life House, Deuce Tattoos, Métis Nation.

**PART 2
PRESENTATIONS**

The Town Hall was moderated by Jane Kali and Harold Eastman. Background information and commentary were provided by Lorie Bird and Jo-Anne Reynolds. These presentations, **Ten Key Things to Know About the Bancroft Water Situation** and a **Time Line** of the water story, are attached in an Appendix at the end of this report.

**PART 3
REPORTS FROM THE MEETING: HAVE YOUR SAY!**

After the introductory presentations, the assembly broke into 12 discussion groups to discuss: How does the increase in water/sewage impact you and/or our town? People shared their serious concerns on how this was going to affect their own lives and how they feared it would hurt the town of Bancroft as a whole.

Here are verbatim comments that were collected from each discussion group and shared with the meeting as a whole.

HOW DOES THE INCREASE IN WATER/SEWAGE IMPACT YOU AND/OR OUR TOWN?

- “Businesses are leaving town: Nothing for tourists. Ghost town”
- “Where does the extra money come from?”
- “Senior’s homes and manor resident’s costs will increase”
- “Cost of water/waste water: making cleanliness expensive. (Showers, laundry, etc.)”
- “Greatly affects vulnerable population”
- “People move here for quality of life and now cannot afford to be here”
- “Affecting real estate businesses”
- “We want water for our town/ we need water, water is life!”
- “We can get back free water/ no to a water ban”
- “Affecting all of the outlying areas (Faraday, Coe Hill, Dungannon, Maynooth, Cardiff)”
- “Already can't afford all bills. The increase is impossible”
- “I'm concerned because I'm finding that the individual living costs are really affecting my standard or quality of life. As well as my mental health. It was literally cheaper for me to live in Vancouver than it now does to live outside Bancroft. Let me show you the math!”
- “Taxes increasing. Business leaving (angry)”
- “Tourism: if costs are more expensive in Bancroft (food, will tourists buy them at home and bring them?)”
- “Businesses in Bancroft will also be hit with the costs. Bancroft is a HUB for the surrounding area”
- “What will happen to businesses in Bancroft? I live in Maynooth, who will have to leave/move? (SCARED)”
- “Impacts those who are most vulnerable to minor fluctuations. Increased taxes, decreased town services (roads, fire, snow removal, etc.), Increased hardships, unlivable-can't pay. (SCARED! ANXIETY!)”
- “Costs to live in rural communities is higher than cities but government assistance and services is much less”
- “Businesses are considering moving out of Bancroft, further depressing the tax base and job opportunities in an area with low employment and low incomes”
- “Water rates in Bancroft seem higher than many other places, especially compared to cities”
- “Confusion: How is debt being paid?”
- “Taxes and rent are too expensive, really can't afford the 53% increase”
- “The water treatment cost increase will drive MORE residents BELOW THE POVERTY LINE when 40%-60% are already on low incomes. Increase will create more poverty and drive newcomers and residents away, increasing price of other services and products in town. (3 repercussions)”
- “Reduction in volunteers because they can't afford transportation”
- “Reduction in employment”
- “Mismanagement of money!”
- “Increase in prices at businesses and may cause business closures”
- “How clean is our waste water??? Who looks after the testing??”
- “How can young adults move out of their parents homes with rent, utilities (especially water/sewage), being so high and increasing?”
- “Especially for seniors, income is down and low, and costs are significantly increasing”
- “WORRIED!! Tourism will die if businesses cannot afford to operate. Individuals already cannot afford to live in Bancroft”
- “CONFUSED!! Business leaving town. Watching friends and family struggle”
- “Fixed incomes or low incomes-money isn't going very far”
- “Increase financial burden on people”

"Quality of life decreases"
 "NO industry. NO manufacturing. Over 40% of population living below poverty level"
 "Difficult choices: electricity OR food OR water OR..."
 "FEAR over this change is going to cause undue stress and lead to real effects on our health!!"
 "My glass is half full - I am in a well and septic, but I am concerned about quality of life for everyone"
 "How much will this affect the price of lettuce at the grocery store??"
 "Financial concern"
 "Feeling confused and blindsided!!"
 "More people won't be able to afford food so food bank has to find new food to help them, and the food bank is already STRETCHED!"
 "Was the creation of the amalgamated townships a coercive contract? Was there any agenda behind all the new fine print? Is this why ALL rural municipalities in the province are now seriously in deep debt? And therefore defacto controlled?"
 "More crime concern"
 "Concern spreading service providers too thin(less people, less service)"
 "53% of what?"
 "We were going to move to the town centre and now we won't! Neither will our parents or family"
 "We are extremely unhappy with the huge and abrupt increase in costs!!"
 "Long term decisions to stay in area will change. We will move away"
 "If this increase goes through - will taxes continue to rise? BIG CONCERN"
 "Cost increase in food and other things"
 "Choice to move in to town has changed, will go elsewhere"
 "We will have to choose between food, heat, and water! We shouldn't have to!"
 "More transparency is required about billing structure and reasons for these problems!!"
 "What programs are in place to conserve water and avoid waste? Water is a human right!!"
 "I have raised concerns about this for years...How can we believe that the problems will improve?"
 "What are people on fixed incomes to do? Concerned about the impact on essential services such as the hospital auxillary? Rents of apartments cannot be raised legally, so how can a landlord continue on? Impact on the growth of our community"
 "Mental health crisis if people so worried"
 "People on fixed income in trouble (ODSP has only increased by \$11.00 over three years)"
 "Water and sewage is now going to be more than rent for those receiving rental assistance"
 "Landlords can't manage units/renters"
 "Bancroft won't grow. Impact on developers. Our water rates compared to 6 other comparable communities - ours is almost double"
 "Costs too high for schools. They will have to make education cuts because their budget won't increase"
 "Hospital & the Manor may be the largest users. They will still have to stay within budget. Also schools"
 "Day Care Centre already appealing for funds. Can't increase fees"
 "Increase in rent. Business closures"
 "We knew it was coming and did not prepare"
 "Bancroft is a retirement community and many on fixed incomes cannot afford to live here"
 "Charitable groups, service institutions can't pass it along to the people they serve"

“Eventually will increase property taxes because increases WILL continue”
“Bad for business (Zehrs \$600-\$800 in 2016 plus 53% increase for store and 4 rental units). Can't increase rents”
“Affect visitors, cottagers, and tourists”
“Town Council pushed it through. WHY?”
“This water increase is very stressful, demeaning, and leads to feelings of hopelessness. It is already near the breaking point just to meet necessities now.”
“Don't sell the dump”
“Need more information and numbers about what the effects are”
“High water, sewage, hydro, and taxes will drive potential businesses away”
“HOPELESSNESS. There's no end to increases. Lots of FEAR!”
“Water should be free”
“Increased water rates cause other products and services to increase in cost”
“ANGRY! How to afford this. Water should be free. Council just hikes the price.” “Increase may cause business closures - unemployment increases.”
“Too expensive to live here”
“Council cannot ignore the effects this will have on our community. Social justice and equality is a basic human right. Our voices need to be loud and unified!!”
“To expect our 7 council members to solve this issue is unrealistic. Where is the leadership? Does that fall upon the community? Stop the crossing of the arms and open them. Let's work together!!”

PART 4

REPORTS FROM THE MEETING: WHAT CAN WE DO?

The facilitators of the 12 discussion groups reported that people were eager to find solutions to this crisis. They wanted to understand how it had come about, hoping that would facilitate finding ways to improve the situation going forward. People expressed a keenness to participate in whatever they could do to help. Overall there was a strong desire for citizens and Town Council to come together on finding solutions.

This report has organized the many suggestions for action into 9 broad categories. They are listed here in descending order from Most Reported.

NOTE: Verbatim reports listed below are comments that received enough consensus for the facilitators of each discussion group to include them in their report back to the assembly as a whole. If a comment appears more than once in the list it means that more than one discussion group described an issue in the same way.

CATEGORY 1. INCREASE TOWN REVENUES

(36 Reports)

This category received the most comments. Everyone agreed that it is necessary to take measures to raise revenue for the Town so that the increase in water rates can be rolled back substantially. There was widespread understanding that a town the size of Bancroft faces a considerable challenge. All the necessary services must be sustained, even though there is an insufficient tax base to collect enough monies to provide them. There was a sense that Bancroft is experiencing slow economic

decline, and that this process must be reversed in the long term. In the short term, there is a need to find sources of revenue that would allow the Town to roll back the water/wastewater increases. People feel that water rates that are too high will just discourage economic growth and hasten the decline.

Here are verbatim reports that relate to increasing revenue to the town.

“Create a plan to attract business and individuals that include moderate water and sewer rates, taxes, hydro etc.”

“Bring in recycling, trash for revenue”

“Move deficit to long-term loan”

“Recycling centre”

“Don’t build a public works yard this year”

“Amalgamation of all northern municipalities”

“Upload costs to country/province”

“Better water contract”

“Amalgamation of Northern Towns”

“Business growth”

“More Industry”

“More tourism”

“Recycle program”

“New revenue from recycling”

“Community live fund raiser where people with more \$\$ can support those on the edge”

“Sell properties to pay down debt”

“Sell excess property assets other than the dump”

“Politicians should take a pay cut and savings applied”

“Metered parking to raise income for Bancroft”

“53% increase or fair increase on town leachate processed for Faraday”

“Close one public bathroom and create gender-neutral bathroom”

“Advertise Millennium Park band shell for private use for rent revenue”

“Better use of town assets, such as the Village Playhouse, etc.”

“Possibly sell some of the town assets”

“Fix leaks in public washrooms”

“Turn off Christmas lights”

“Lease assets, create revenue with assets, don’t sell assets”

“Create revenue with assets we do have”

“Town lottery to raise funds”

“Fund raiser to pay off debt”

“Sell lottery tickets to city folks”

“Raffle off cottage stays”

“Perhaps the OPP can give us a refund on our policy”

“Citizens’ group could work on selling IGA property or making a community-minded use of it that would bring in revenue”

“Sell the old IGA property for ½ of what it is listed for. Get rid of it. You will never get back what was paid for it.”

“Sell town property to pay for debt”

CATEGORY 2. PRESSURE ON TOWN COUNCIL

(27 Reports)

There was a broad consensus in the meeting that the community must look to our Town Council to lead us out of this crisis. People expressed disappointment with how the Council came to implement these rates increases but also shared a great desire to support Council in finding solutions. People seemed willing to accept compromises in other areas that would provide rate relief. Those present at this meeting want to put pressure on Town Council to take community concern about the water rates seriously. People expect the rate increase to be rolled back as soon as possible.

A minority of the people present expressed acceptance of the rate increase as it stands and that economic growth over time is the only thing that will relieve the pressure on rate-payers.

Here are the verbatim reports that relate to putting pressure on Town Council.

- “A complete tax town audit to find savings across the board”
- “Why was the most aggressive option selected? Look again at the other 5 options for managing rate increases.”
- “Delay the increase until a better solution is found”
- “All North Hastings communities should be paying equally for police (phase it in today)”
- “Citizens water committee & more voices to council”
- “Find a way to boost morale here. Don’t criticize council, recognize/cultivate feel good stories around town”
- “Don’t criticize council – we can help them find a solution”
- “Restructure town budget for transparency”
- “Silent protest vigil”
- “Whole town stop paying their bills in protest”
- “Is it time for town to declare bankruptcy and face the repercussions so we can start over fresh?”
- “Don’t Pay! Hold payments hostage until OCWA gives us answers! Or until there is a viable solution”
- “People don’t pay the increase and tell our story for Global. You need to start listening to us about rates and taxes”
- “Make our payments under protest each time”
- “Ensure consequences for mismanagement of \$\$”
- “Someone in town management is solely responsible for financial management of water and sewage”
- “Broaden the tax base to outside”
- “Boycott protest! Don’t pay your water bill”
- “Continue to speak out. We will not pay!”
- “We protest where we burn our bills. Vigil”
- “Increase the bills for 5 years, until deficit is down and then lower bill”
- “Camera study, yes!”
- “Find a less expensive alternative to OCWA”
- “Make increase more gradual”
- “Declare bankruptcy”
- “Mayor and councillors must protect the town”
- “Can the town stop paying to OCWA?”

CATEGORY 3. SUSTAINABILITY

(23 Reports)

People expressed a great interest in finding ways to sustain the Town of Bancroft over the long term. The water/wastewater rates issue was seen in the context of the need for water protection and conservation. Sustainability was seen as an area where community volunteer activity could work in concert with town staff to make substantial improvements that would save money on water and be better for the environment.

Here are verbatim comments related to sustainability.

- “Catch basins, don’t need to connect to the treatment plant”
- “Raise local incomes to reasonable levels so people can afford utilities”
- “Cisterns for each home”
- “Bancroft Shift Fest” sustainability festival”
- “Conserve water use”
- “The province could give grants for composting toilets”
- “Permit grey water wells in town”
- “Volunteer inspections for water flow in town”
- “Possible sustainable business on IGA property: owned by Town or social enterprise”
- “Allow people to disconnect from sewage”
- “Promote solutions of self sufficiency”
- “Public toilets could be chemical”
- “Our water supply can be used to heat a house and then passed as waste water”
- “Education about water conservation”
- “Should people run taps to keep pipes from freezing?”
- “Introduce water efficiency program (conservation team)”
- “Get composting toilets”
- “Compost toilets are \$2k and that gets paid off fairly fast at the new rates”
- “Become self reliant, self sufficient as possible. But that wont help poor folks who can’t afford compost toilets and gray water systems.”
- “Drain gray water outside for gardens”
- “Allow more outhouses”
- “Many composting toilets”
- “Boys allowed to use trees to pee”

CATEGORY 4. PRESSURE ON THE PROVINCE

(20 Reports)

There was almost as much discussion of the role of the government of the Province of Ontario in this water problem as there was about Town Council. A general consensus was that the Province is as responsible as the Town for what has happened and for what relief should be provided. The people expressed willingness to stand with our Town Council in forcefully presenting Bancroft needs to the Province.

Here are verbatim reports relating to putting pressure on the Province.

- “Ask Province to reintroduce septage rules”
- “Provincial government pay us to fix the plant”

“March on Queens Park”
 “Upload costs to Province”
 “Provincial audit done on town and WW System”
 “Lobby Ontario government to pay for cancelling septage deal”
 “Interest killing us. Demand longer term loan from Province. Would this reduce the rate hike to 22%?”
 “Lobby for Province”
 “Ask Province for lower electric on sewage plant”
 “Secede from the unlawful contract. ‘Are they in breach?’ ”
 “Apply for grants”
 “Clean water act states: “the expectation is user pay”? Challenge this!”
 “We do not need the Provincial involvement in downloading their debt on municipalities.”
 “Take more aggressive political action to bring the provinces to the plight of small towns like ours”
 “A large part of Bancroft is crown land; therefore federal government should help with this issue”
 “Question: We have crown land in our area & Ontario Algonquin land claim. Do transfers from the federal government for infrastructure \$\$ include \$\$ for waste water?”
 “Large protest, lots of media attention”
 “Hit the media in a big way!”
 “Get main-stream media on the story to dig for details”
 “Deliver outhouse to Kathleen Wynne at Queens Park & tell her to use it”

CATEGORY 5. MORE DEMOCRACY

(20 Reports)

Every discussion group reported a strong desire for more transparency and accountability from those in authority (Town Council, Town Staff, OCWA and the Province) combined with more participation by the community. People want to feel their voice is heard. The community believes itself to be a valuable resource of knowledge and volunteer effort. People do not feel as if they know how to get enough information about Town decision-making. The community would like to be more involved. A large majority of people present at this meeting indicated that they would welcome more Town Halls like this one.

Here are verbatim comments relating to democracy.

“Solidarity with town council – fight this together”
 “More accountability! We are the government!”
 “Be more engaged, work with council”
 “Continue community consults like this regularly”
 “Write letters, e-mails”
 “More political action”
 “Ask for complete transparency at all levels of government. Analyze.”
 “Transparency and accountability before raising rates”
 “Problem was identified in 2003 and town was told to increase then and councillors didn’t?”
 “Look at town staff”
 “Poor decisions form town, not enough info, community not participating, this is a wakeup call”

“More people to go to Town Council meetings”
“What is best time for Town Council meetings”
“Contracts require full disclosure”
“How can bills be paid, that were not clearly understood/broken down/itemized”
“Create a think tank”
“Where are the mayor and other councillors? Should be here to participate.”
“Where are previous councillors? They should be a part of this?”
“Where are Todd Smith and Mike Bossio?”
“Continue to have meetings”

CATEGORY 6. PRESSURE ON OCWA

(19 Reports)

People were aware that OCWA is the company who manage our water and that this company is in the last year of its current contract. There was a sense that the community does not know enough about the role OCWA has played in bringing things to this point and what they may be able to do towards improving the situation. People would like to have more facts. They are not satisfied with the explanation that water/wastewater treatment has become so much more costly since the installation of the new treatment plant. Some have picked up on inconsistencies in OCWA reporting. Most present at this meeting want to make sure that Town Council puts appropriate pressure on OCWA to account for what they have charged the Town and to make sure that fair practises are being followed.

Here are verbatim comments concerning OCWA.

“Demand transparency & clarification from OCWA / Ombudsman”
“Investigate the mechanics of the plant”
“Council must demand honesty from OCWA and not be undermined by them”
“Request IWA water audit”
“Check the meters at the water plant”
“The Plant must be investigated and run more effectively”
“Increase accountability from OCWA”
“OCWA should be at this table to explain and answer to Bancroft and area”
“Decommission parts of the wastewater plant”
“Find the source of the extra water being treated”
“Shop around for alternatives to OCWA ie; other companies, etc. Inviting proposals from other companies”
“Decommission parts of the plant that are ineffective”
“Working group of local experts to brain storm Tech solutions”
“Full audit of OCWA to see if we are over paying”
“Step up OCWA. Share the pain.”
“Yes to RFP for other companies”
“Citizen oversight”
“Decommission Sewer Plant”
“We should all poop at OCWA’s house”

CATEGORY 7. LEARN AND WORK WITH OTHER TOWNS

(11 Reports)

There was great interest expressed in every discussion group as to how other towns are handling their water/wastewater treatment and how they are coping with the affordability crisis facing small rural towns. People had a feeling that Bancroft cannot be alone in facing these problems. People would like to try things that have worked well in other towns. They also would like to join with other towns in appealing to the Province for assistance. Some individuals have volunteered to research what is happening in other towns.

Here are verbatim comments relating to learning from other towns.

“What do other towns do to make OCWA accountable?”

“Find other towns that have similar issues and how they are dealing with it”

“Work with other municipalities that have experience in this area”

“Confer with municipalities to see their solution and best-practise models”

“Why is this a small community problem? We are regionally marginalized”

“We can’t be the only ones facing these problems, lets share by talking to others and find solutions. Maybe things are working better somewhere else.”

“Coalition of small towns to lobby Government”

“Research what other communities have done in similar situation”

“Involve other communities. ej; cottagers”

“Reach out to cottagers and tourist for help. Let them know what’s happening.

Maybe they can shed some light and share knowledge”

“Work with other towns with this problem”

CATEGORY 8. TAKE BACK MANAGEMENT OF OUR WATER SYSTEM

(10 Reports)

Though there was not a complete concensus on this point, there was a wide majority in favour of the Town of Bancroft eventually retaking the management of our water system. This came up in 10 out of 12 discussion groups. The planning committee for the Town Hall has been researching a worldwide trend towards *remunicipalization*. This is happening in many places as town councils are finding that many services privatized over the past two or three decades have become unaffordable. It was suggested that the next company contracted to provide water management be asked to train some local personnel for future management of the water system as town staff.

Here are verbatim comments relating to remunicipalization of the water system.

“Town manage H2O and sewage”

“In the next RFP for water treatment providers: ask them to train local managers & workers to take over municipal ownership of system after their first 5 year contract ends”

“Take back running the wastewater plant”

“OCWA staff work for town”

“Take back management of water plant”

“Town do work itself and stop contracting out”

“Return to Public Utilities Commission”

“Separate PUC to operate and manage the system
“Bancroft should take over the treatment plant and employ locals to run it.”
“Keep monies local”
“Create more local jobs by running the treatment centre ourselves”

CATEGORY 9. DO NOT SELL THE DUMP

(8 Reports)

A fair number of people came to the meeting concerned that the Town Council would seek to solve the current financial crisis by selling the Dungannon Landfill Site. They wanted to make sure that their opposition to this would be recorded and relayed to Town Council. The vast majority of people at this meeting agreed with them. The Landfill Site is seen as a valuable asset, the loss of which would cost us greatly in the long run.

There was less consensus on whether or not the Landfill Site should be used to generate revenue through the acceptance of waste and recycling from other communities. Most seemed opposed to this option.

Here are verbatim comments relating to selling the dump.

“Don’t sell the dump, make money with it”
“Opposed to selling the dump, sell the others”
“Don’t sell the dump, use it wisely”
“Dump 4 sell...NO! this is a fiscally poor decision which would cost the municipality and the people more in the future”
“Don’t sell the Dungannon dump”
“Don’t sell the dump! The town will sacrifice equity and user costs will increase”
“Do not sell the dump, jobs will be lost”
“Being forced to sell assets like the dump or let other municipalities use it shouldn’t even be on the table “

PART 5

NEXT STEPS

a. Circulation and Feedback. This report will be released to the press on March 31, 2017. The meeting planners will make an effort to circulate the Report widely. It will be posted online and sent to all those who provided their contact information at the Town Hall. It will be given to Town Council, Town Staff, the MP and MPP of the riding, OCWA and officials of the Province of Ontario. These people and groups will be invited to respond.

b. Follow-up Water Rates Town Hall. If the water/wastewater rates are not rolled back, the planning committee is ready to facilitate another Town Hall. This event will provide an opportunity for Bancroft Town Council and staff, OCWA and the Province to speak and answer questions. Some team members are currently researching what is happening in other small rural towns, in order to be able to report on that. The follow-up Town Hall will be a forum for citizens to understand what response there has been to the first community meeting and to come together to plan collective action.

To respond to this report with your feedback and to participate in the Follow-up Water Rates Town Hall, please contact the planning committee by email: gnomesforjusticenorthhastings@gmail.com or call 613-334-6720.

PART 6 APPRECIATION

Giving thanks: This Town Hall could not have happened without the generous support of our community and good friends.

Thank you to the people at The Legion for donating the space for the event. Thank you Marsha Depotier of Algonquin Nation for opening the event and sharing the connections between land and water and community. Thank you to the Community Advocacy and Legal Clinic (CALC) for a donation of \$150 and a big thank you to Arif Hussain who attended the gathering on behalf of CALC. Thank you to Don Wilson for a donation. Thank you to Bancroft Times for donating photo-copying.

Thank you to our sponsors: Métis Nation, Maggie's Resource Centre, The Partista, A Place for the Arts, North Hastings Community Trust, The Gnomes for Social Justice and Equality, The Bancroft Dollar Store Plus & Deuce Tattoos.

And the biggest of thanks to all of you who supported and attended this community event.

This is just the beginning.

Respectfully submitted,
Volunteer Planning Committee,
Water Rates Town Hall,
Bancroft, Ontario
March 31, 2017

APPENDIX A / Ten Key Things to Know about the Bancroft Water Situation

Page 1

Ten Key Things to Know about the Bancroft Water Situation

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1

It's really a wastewater situation. The increase in rates applies mostly to the treatment of sewage and drain water. This wastewater portion of our water bills is going up 100 percent, due to growing costs for treating wastewater over the last six years. The drinking water portion is going up 6 percent. The combined increase is therefore 53 percent.

2

Some of us will be completely unable to pay the increased costs. Five out of every ten households in Bancroft live below the "poverty line" defined by the province. Within that 50 percent of households, some of us who are already overwhelmed with rising costs for electricity and food will simply be unable to afford water and sewage service.

3

We as a town stopped operating our wastewater treatment plant ourselves in 2001, and signed a contract with an outside organization to run it. The organization is the Ontario Clean Water Agency (OCWA), a crown agency responsible to the provincial government, much like Hydro One. Our current contract with OCWA runs out this year.

4

In 2008, the province gave us the money to replace our aging wastewater plant. The new, larger plant also included extra capacity to treat "septage." The reason: in 2002, the province had announced plans to prohibit the spreading of untreated septic sludge on fields. Our town saw a potential revenue opportunity to treat septage for other municipalities. But the province abandoned the treatment requirement in 2011, and we were left with an oversized facility.

5

The cost to operate the new wastewater plant was much higher than anticipated. From 2010 to 2015, our wastewater treatment costs increased 76%.

6

The extra costs weren't clear for several years because of how our town budget was structured. Grant money for building the new plant flowed into the wastewater budget from 2008 to 2012, masking steadily growing treatment costs. The first hints of trouble came in 2014, but the scale of the problem wasn't completely clear until 2015.

7

Since discovering the problem, we as a town have been covering the extra costs with a line of credit while investigating causes and solutions. The wastewater deficit is now around \$2 million.

8

OCWA has explained that the extra costs have come from unforeseen increases in electricity rates and higher-than-expected amounts of wastewater being processed by the plant. However the information they have provided to make their case has been inconsistent.

9

A study by a consultant in 2016 suggested an increase in wastewater and drinking water rates that would eliminate the wastewater deficit in 10 years. Our Council accepted the recommendation for the rate increases.

10

There may be other solutions to the problem, in addition to or instead of the current rate increase. As a town, we're pursuing some of those solutions already.

Some of the options:

- Our Council is inviting proposals from other companies to run the plant more economically.
- Council has commissioned a camera study of the wastewater lines this year to determine if and where water is leaking into the system.
- Decommission parts of the wastewater plant in order to reduce costs.
- Sell some of our town assets. The most valuable is the Dugannon dump.
- Take material from other municipalities at the Dugannon site, generating extra revenue.
- Take more aggressive political action to bring the province's attention to the plight of small towns like ours.
- Make more use of our own people to find new and innovative solutions.

This material has been prepared by community members of a volunteer Planning Committee for the Water Rates Town Hall, March 1, 2017. The information below is based on available information and is accurate to the best of our knowledge and is meant as a discussion piece only. Some information may contain errors.

APPENDIX B / Time Line

The information below is based on available information and is accurate to the best of our knowledge and is meant as a discussion piece only. Some information may contain errors.
Water and Waste Water Time Line:

- 2008 – New cost plus contract and construction begins on new waste water plant. New Plant is designed to increase daily flow capacities from 1,137m³/d to 1,632m³/d due to an increase in flows. Town is informed by Province that there will be a change to the Nutrient Act which will ban municipalities from spreading septage on farmer's fields. In response engineers design a large septage treatment portion of the new plant in anticipation of the increase in septage from surrounding municipalities.
- 2011 – New sewage plant comes online and Hydro costs double from approximately \$75,000 in 2010 to over \$150,000 in 2011 see table 7. The annual flows also rises to an eight year high of 415,514 m³ see Table 6.
- 2011 – Province changes their minds and decides to not alter the Nutrient Act
- 2011- Costs of new plant result in an increase in total Water and waste water costs of \$204,556 over the 2010 cost. Cost in 2010: \$665,132. Cost in 2011 \$869,688.
- 2012- Costs continue to rise for water and waste water to \$979,840 in 2012. Costs have now risen \$314,708 in two years. A 47% increase over the 2010 cost.
- 2012 - New Contract negotiated and signed in September 2012. Contract was a fixed contract with a base cost of \$983,289.
- 2012- From 2008 to 2012 grant monies continued to flow in for construction and completion of the waste water plant and the budget for the construction of the plant is mixed in with the waste water budget masking the increased cost. See figure 1. In 2014 when combined with the water surplus the waste water deficit still appeared relatively small, but by 2015 it had overwhelmed the water surplus and grown exponentially.

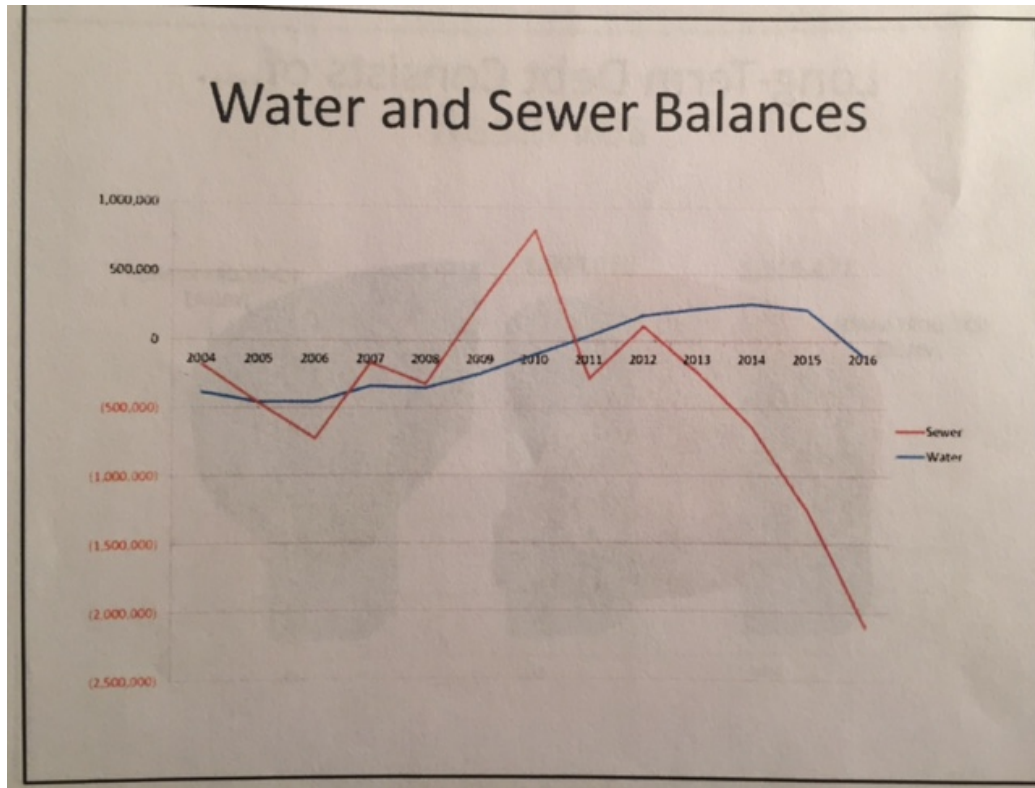


Figure 1 – Source: Town of Bancroft Budget Presentation May 24, 2016

- 2015- Don Taylor was asked to look into the water and waste water and presented his findings to council in early 2015 where the size of the deficit became apparent.
- 2015- Meeting with OCWA where council was informed that the bulk of the problem is inflow and infiltration. Both water loss at the water plant and infiltration into the sewer system. For example in 2015 400,000 m³ of waste water was treated while only approximately 150,000 m³ was billed. Total treated water in 2015 was 298,054 m³ billing including maintenance was 203,917m³.
- 2015 – OCWA conducts a ‘ping’ test to check for leaks to the water line and it comes back negative
- 2016 – A water and waste water working group is formed using professionals throughout the community including engineers and those with 20 plus years experience working in water and waste water in an attempt to identify the inflow and infiltration issues.
- 2016- OCWA performs a further test of the water system and concludes that the water system “has no significant leaks.”
- 2016 – Watson and Associates are hired to examine the deficit problem and come up with scenarios to deal with the problem.
- 2016 – Council is advised by their auditors and Watson and Associates that they will run out of money if they do not pass scenario 3a which entails a 100% increase in Waste Water rates and a 6% increase in Water rates. Council passes the new rates to take effect January 1st 2017.
- 2017 – Cameraing of the waste water system is scheduled for the spring in an attempt to identify the inflow and infiltration.

Scenario 3a

The scenario that was approved, scenario 3a, is a ten year plan to pay back the deficit , cover the cost of maintaining and running the waste water and water plant as well as future capital costs. It requires removing at least \$200,000 dollars from the operating funds per year for the duration. If we consider the additional gas tax monies that were approved to be removed as well that brings it up to \$300,000 per year. A one percent tax increase is approximately \$50,000 dollars which means if nothing else is cut from the general budget taxes will be required to go up 6% just to cover the transfer to water and waste water.

Over the life of the contract approximately \$3,000,000 dollars will have been removed from the operating budget impacting residents in both wards by not only causing tax increases, but most likely a further reduction in available services.

For 2017 we have received approximately extra funding from the Ontario Municipal Partnership Fund (OMPF), an increase in gas tax funding as well as a reduction in OPP costs that will help offset the extra cost accrued from transferring monies over to water and waste water.

The main assumption for scenario 3a to be successful is that we will receive the full amount of the sewer rate increase which amounts to \$476,500 this year and \$953,000 over all for waste water alone. Not to mention the recommended 5% increase per year for the 4 years following the initial 100% increase.

Given the census numbers from 2011 this is highly unlikely as the median household income was \$40,568 dollars and the median income for a single person hovers around \$23,000. The numbers for single women with and without families are even lower. With the ever increasing price of Hydro, food and rent over half of Bancroft’s population are already struggling to pay the bills they have now. So this will most likely result in an increase in our arrears which currently fluctuates between \$700,000 and \$1,000,000.

Council made a request to see what the waste water rate increase would be if the waste water deficit was removed. Our consultant did the calculation and it was revealed that the sewer rate would go up 27% and the water rate would remain unchanged. This would mean that the combined rate would drop to 16.5% as opposed to 53%.

Town of Bancroft Sewer History	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Balance at Beginning of Year	198,604.57	205,904.45	(6,468.48)	(269,097.32)	176,783.21
Revenue					
Residential Charges	123,441.91	156,847.95	177,844.20	198,479.73	221,509.84
Commercial Charges	122,852.50	149,762.81	179,162.32	206,746.50	233,594.00
Leachate	104,715.60	50,335.44	18,652.10		
Local Improvement	3,272.16	3,272.16	3,272.16	3,272.16	3,272.16
Grants				443,140.17	
LTD Proceeds				500,000.00	
Transfer from Reserves		(20,190.65)	9,377.16		(9,067.32)
Fees	2,105.79	3,015.84	47,862.85	56,733.85	50,242.21
Penalties	15,080.70	14,154.70	4,753.21	3,982.53	4,026.81
Total Revenue	371,468.66	357,198.25	440,924.00	1,412,354.94	503,577.70
Expense					
Salary and Benefits	19,547.45	22,243.17	22,128.39	25,137.80	27,194.70
LTD Payments				10,074.38	18,631.78
Materials	8,645.40	22,590.55	9,978.83	8,861.47	11,078.46
Services	237,315.76	244,133.19	338,443.50	280,808.47	452,931.53
Capital	58,660.17	337,393.61	333,002.09	641,582.29	139,344.44
Administration	40,000.00	40,000.00			
To Balance		(96,789.34)	0.03	10.00	
Total Expenses	364,168.78	569,571.18	703,552.84	966,474.41	649,180.91
Net for the Year	7,299.88	(212,372.93)	(262,628.84)	445,880.53	(145,603.21)
Balance at end of year	205,904.45	(6,468.48)	(269,097.32)	176,783.21	31,180.00
Balance per statement					

Table 1 - Supplementary information to Fig 1 Town of Bancroft Sewer History 2004 - 2008

Town of Bancroft Sewer History	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Balance at Beginning of Year	31,180.00	529,508.21	932,504.82	(318,787.43)	(79,060.58)	(474,682.98)
Revenue						
Residential Charges	245,565.74	273,651.70	262,678.77	261,974.07	252,309.55	243,412.04
Commercial Charges	277,029.39	284,846.96	264,370.56	257,578.91	261,426.94	260,923.79
Leachate						51,308.61
Local Improvement	3,272.16	3,219.91	3,219.91	3,219.91	3,219.91	3,219.91
Grants	355,572.46	4,240,909.56	1,398,711.80			
LTD Proceeds	620,000.00	2,380,001.00		593,000.00		
Transfer from Reserves	(1,716.54)	(625.60)	401,703.46			
Fees	85,126.37	75,101.09	58,736.01	46,317.07	74,921.06	9,784.64
Penalties	5,373.21	6,036.29	7,153.86	6,148.23	5,716.00	5,506.49
Total Revenue	1,590,222.79	7,263,140.91	2,396,574.37	1,168,238.19	597,593.46	574,155.48
Expense						
Salary and Benefits	29,569.65	26,864.67	27,820.38	28,415.82	29,035.03	28,939.10
LTD Payments	5,496.74	29,061.90	154,756.12	235,205.71	239,412.65	239,412.64
Materials	10,638.51	11,505.30	10,684.67	16,490.26	9,414.40	16,777.48
Services	445,999.90	463,398.81	604,630.58	587,531.74	650,134.03	681,442.83
Capital	600,189.78	6,329,313.62	2,783,700.19	20,888.57	25,219.75	13,620.42
Administration			66,274.68	39,979.24	40,000.00	40,000.00
To Balance						
Total Expenses	1,091,894.58	6,860,144.30	3,647,866.62	928,511.34	993,215.86	1,020,192.47
Net for the Year	498,328.21	402,996.61	(1,251,292.25)	239,726.85	(395,622.40)	(446,036.99)
Balance at end of year	529,508.21	932,504.82	(318,787.43)	(79,060.58)	(474,682.98)	(920,719.97)
Balance per statement						(907,157.00)
						-13,562.97

Table 2 - Supplementary information to Fig 1 Town of Bancroft Sewer History 2009-2014

OCWA				
Year	Sewer	Water	Total	
2015	\$ 646,879.00	\$ 374,082.00	\$ 1,020,961.00	
2014	\$ 630,487.00	\$ 364,602.00	\$ 995,089.00	
2013	\$ 616,058.00	\$ 367,022.00	\$ 983,080.00	
2012	\$ 606,412.00	\$ 373,428.00	\$ 979,840.00	
2011	\$ 500,895.00	\$ 368,793.00	\$ 869,688.00	
2010	\$ 366,983.00	\$ 298,149.00	\$ 665,132.00	
2009	\$ 357,995.00	\$ 283,281.00	\$ 641,276.00	

Table 1 - Total water and sewer costs 2009 - 2015

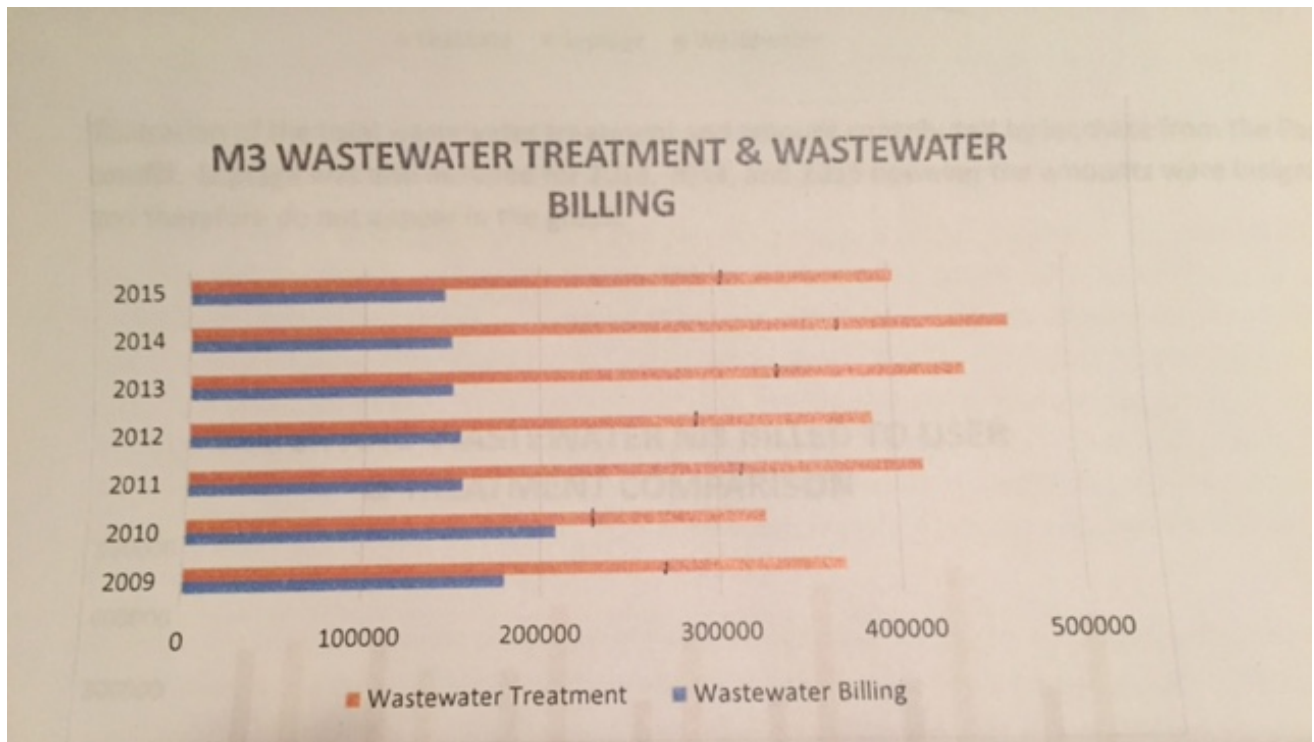


Table 4 - Wastewater treatment vs wastewater billing. Town of Bancroft Water and Waste Water update November 22, 2016

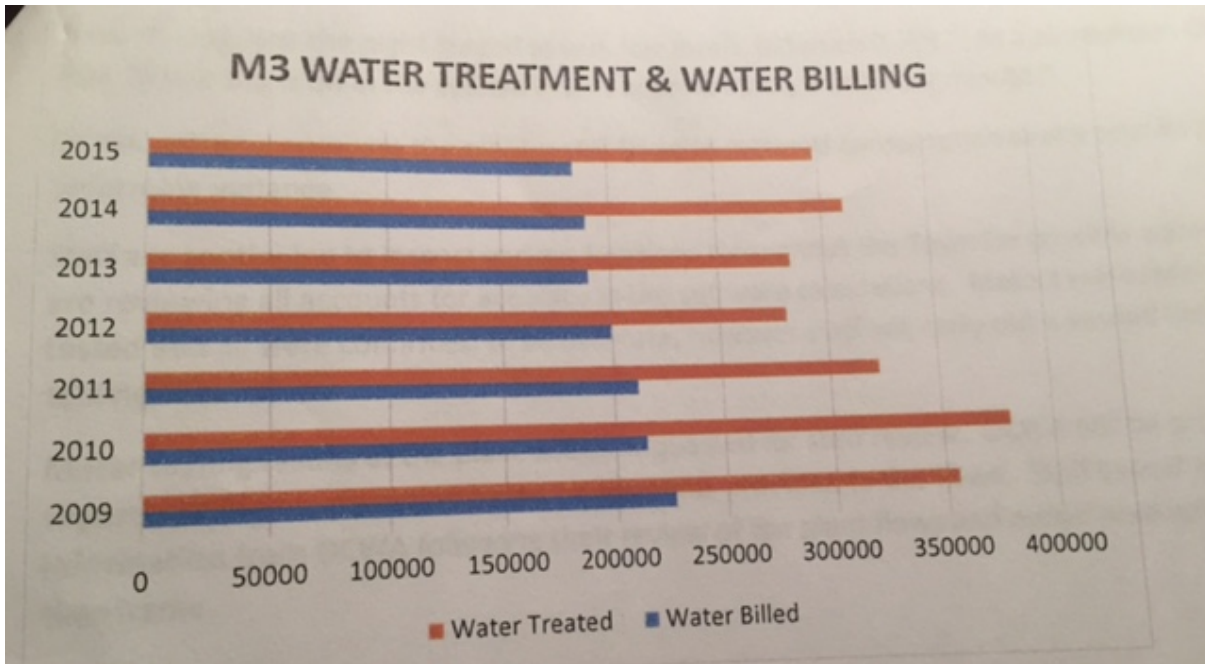


Table 5- Water treated vs water billed 2009- 2014. Town of Bancroft Water and Waste Water update November 22, 2016

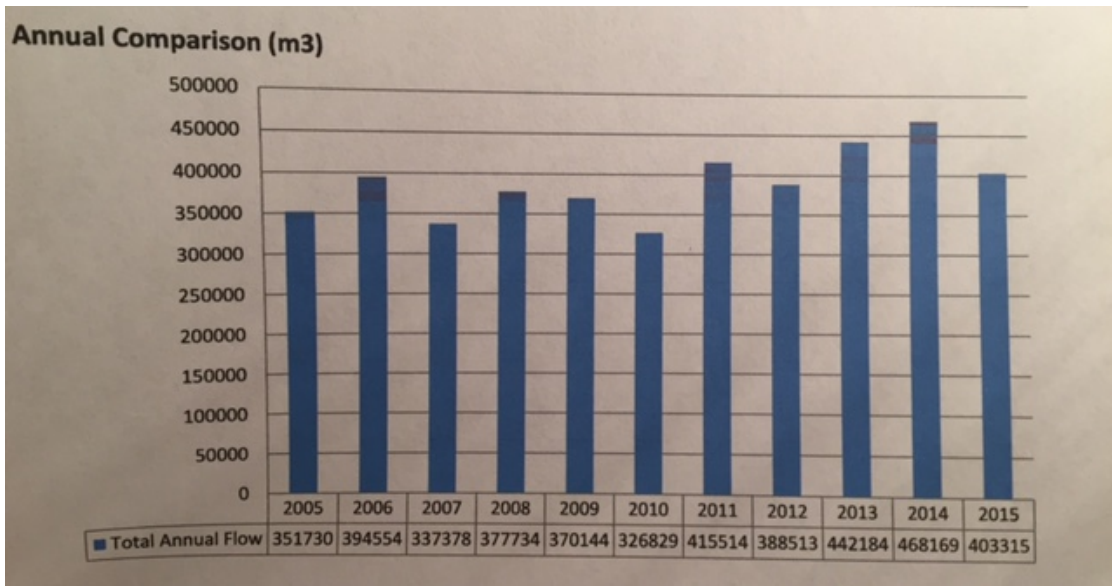
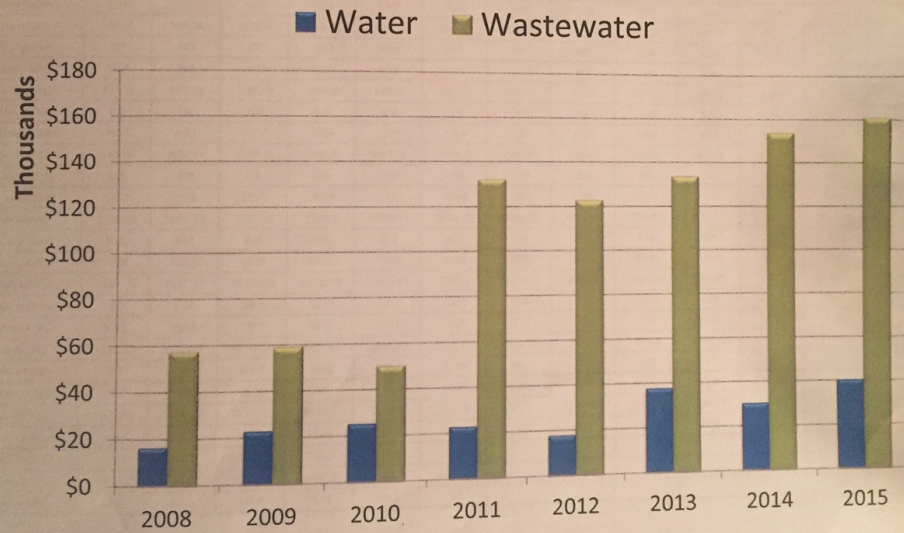


Table 6- Annual m3 of treated waste water from 2005 – 2015. Source: Bancroft Waste Water System Annual report 2015. Prepared by the Ontario Clean Water Agency.

Town of Bancroft Hydro Review 2008-2015



Strictly Confidential

Table 7- Source: Ontario Clean Water Agency Town of Bancroft Hydro Review for Water and Waste Water 2008-2015