

COMMUNITY: Town sees 16% jobs growth PAGE A2

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Next stop for rail tunnel

Brockville council approves consultants' contract for second phase of restoration

RONALD ZAJAC
THE RECORDER AND TIMES

After some initial reluctance, Brockville council has agreed to hire a consulting firm, at a cost of nearly \$85,000, to draw up plans for the next phase of the historic railway tunnel project.

Councillors on Tuesday backed a motion to hire Mark Thompson Brandt Architect (MTBA) Associates Inc., of Ottawa, for \$84,765, "to develop concepts for the former railway lands north-east of William and Brock Streets, including a public consultation process."

The north-side lands represent the second phase in a longer-term project to restore Brockville's historic railway tunnel, deemed Canada's oldest.

The first phase, which is now underway, aims to rehabilitate and restore the tunnel itself and its north-portal gorge.

Workers are securing the tunnel structurally, putting in lighting and security cameras and laying down a paved walkway. The first phase is also to include the purchase of the "Rotary Train," a rubber-wheeled vehicle that will ferry tourists between the north and south ends of the tunnel.

In November, city council gave the tunnel committee permission to increase the cost of the first phase from \$2,500,000 to \$3,974,496, in order to add an elaborate lighting system.

The city has so far committed \$300,000 toward the tunnel project.

Despite backing this latest step, some councillors stressed that support comes with caution.

Councillor Tom Blanchard remained wary of the consultant option, arguing it makes more sense to open the tunnel first to gauge demand for the attraction.

"It just seems to me a little bit that the cart is before the horse here," said Blanchard, who later suggested the tunnel committee might be overestimating tourist demand.

"I just think this part of the project is premature," added Blanchard.

Councillor Jeff Earle, a frequent skeptic of consulting firms, said he was refraining from such a "rant" this time because the MTBA contract won't be paid for with city money.

The tunnel group plans to pay for the MTBA work from money it obtained in a senior government grant.

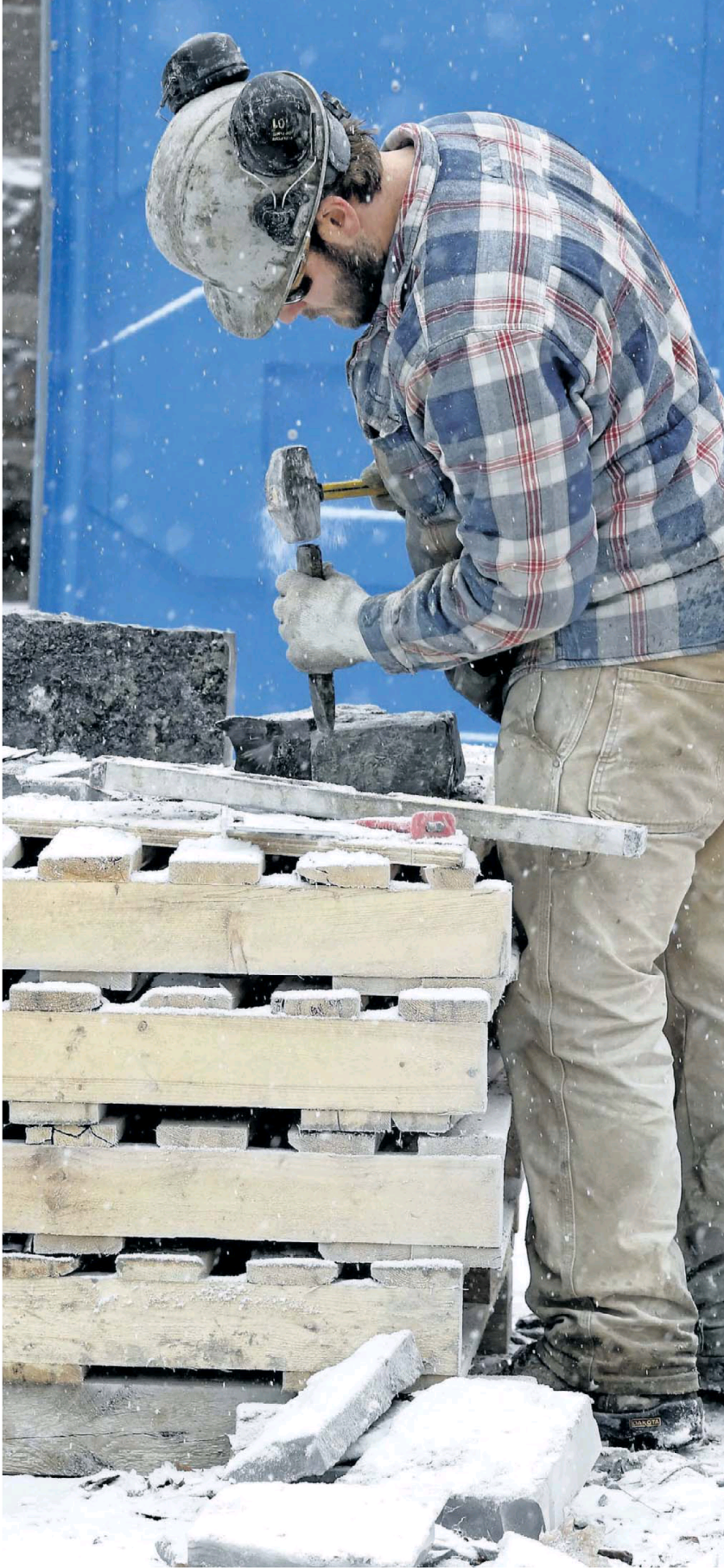
However, Earle wants a clear picture of the tunnel's eventual maintenance costs, adding they will fall to the city.

Councillor Mike Kalivas echoed that caution.

"At the end of the day, we're going to be responsible for it," said Kalivas. "I'm just saying be careful and we want to make sure that everyone is on board with this."

Councillor Jason Baker, while now supporting the MTBA study, warned colleagues that the firm's public consultations might hear "unrealistic expectations" for the next phase.

In the same vein, Mayor David Henderson cautioned there are "no guarantees about what else



Ryan Miles of Phoenix Restoration doesn't have the protection of the historic Railway Tunnel as he chips away at a block of limestone during a snowfall on Tuesday morning.

presents its concepts together with their costs.

Jack Kenny, another tunnel committee member, updated councillors on the project Tuesday, including a list of donors and the range of

that the project's second phase is "conceptual" at this stage.

"There's nothing that's firm or committed to, but as a committee we can see some functions that could go on up there," said Kenny

for buses and a ticket booth.

Hiring a planning consultant ensures this phase is properly done, with accurate cost estimates to make fundraising easier, he added.

Peddling for paved shoulders to pedal

WAYNE LOWRIE
POSTMEDIA NETWORK

It is a rare council meeting of the Township of Leeds and the Thousand Islands that John Paul Jackson doesn't bring up the issue of bicycle paths.

The municipal councillor and avid cyclist has been peddling his vision of a bike-friendly rural township, spider-webbed with bicycle paths since his election two years ago.

Jackson has learned not to call them "bicycle paths," though.

In the political parlance of today, it's "paved shoulders."

Paved shoulders are more politically salable to the rural municipalities that make up the United Counties of Leeds and Grenville, according to Jackson.

Rural residents and politicians often view bike paths as a foreign, big-city frill that would be used mainly by outsiders, while paved shoulders is a term much closer to home.

Jackson says that county support for paved shoulders is crucial because the main routes through the TLT1 are owned and maintained by the counties, not the township. Think Highways 2, 3 and 32. Although the TLT1 owns 330 kilometres of roads, most of those are gravel.

In wooing counties' support for paved shoulders, TLT1 Mayor Joe Baptista, who sits on counties council, and Jackson stress the cost benefits of paving shoulders.

Jackson said studies of paved shoulders in Lennox and Addington and in Grey counties indicate they would pay for themselves over the life of the road by reducing maintenance costs.

Other studies suggest the life expectancy of roads can be increased by five years.

The edges of the road last longer, road crews don't have to re-gravel and grade the sides of the road and clean the gravel out of culverts, they reduce the need to control growth on the side of roads and they make snow removal easier, Jackson said in a report that he submitted to counties councillors.

He said Lennox and Addington figured it would recoup the cost of its paved shoulders over eight to 10 years, while Grey County estimated it would take 15 years.

Those counties are only two among the handful of nearby counties that have hopped on the paved-shoulder bandwagon, Jackson said.

Lanark's three-year-old program is 30 per cent complete, Haliburton has an informal one-metre-wide shoulder policy on major roads and Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry has a shoulder-paving policy for Highway 2.

In fact, Jackson said, cycling groups have rated Leeds and Grenville as one the most unfriendly counties toward cyclists in the province.

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