

AMHERST ISLAND FERRY

Province to run dock

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A small but heavily-used piece of Loyalist Township will soon be in provincial hands, and township council couldn't be happier to see it go.

Eleven years ago, the federal government downloaded the Amherst Island ferry docks at Stella and Millhaven to an unenthusiastic pre-amalgamation townships of Amherst Island and Ernestown as part of a national divestment program.

The ferry is provincially owned and municipally run and almost since the day the transfer occurred, Loyalist officials have been lobbying the provincial government to take over the two docks, in part because of the high cost of upgrading them from side-loading docks to the more efficient front-loading style used by ferries at Glenora and Wolfe Island.

This week the government announced that it intended to begin negotiations with township officials that would lead to the transfer of the two docks.

"This is great news for Loyalist Township," said CAO Diane Pearce yesterday.

"This is actually the only place in the province that a provincially-owned ferry docks at a municipally-owned dock."

The Frontenac II, the ferry that serves the island, can be loaded both from the side, or from the bow and stern.

A study commissioned by the township in 2006 estimated that it would cost \$4 million to convert the docks to allow front loading and unloading. The price will have gone up since as a result of inflation.

That figure does not include an environmental assessment of the sites that would have to be done before any work could be done. The study and cleanup of anything that was found on the sites could run into six figures.

When the province takes over the dock, it will be responsible for paying for the environmental assessment and any remediation that needs to be done, as well as the cost of converting the docks to allow front-loading.

Front-loading will not only be more efficient but less damaging to the environment.

Currently, the ferry must use both its engines to push itself against the docks while loading from the side, a manoeuvre that wastes fuel and emits pollution.

The township had applied for money from the federal-provincial infrastructure fund to pay for the conversion of the docks, but that application was turned down in favour of projects that were, in government parlance, "shovel-ready."

The dock project was not ready to start construction because the environmentalists had not been done.

No date has been set either to when the province will take over the docks or begin to renovate them, but township reeve Clayton McEwen said he was eager to begin negotiations to transfer the municipally-owned pieces of land.

He said converting the docks to allow front-loading would benefit both commuters and island farmers who use the boat to transport agricultural supplies and equipment.

Say Goodbye to the Frontenac II

Beacon, August/September
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PHOTO BY TERRY CULBERT

Loyalist Township announced that the M.V. Frontenac II will be temporarily replaced by Prince Edward County's Quinte Loyalist from October 13th until December 23rd.