

Mutton Bridge repair stalls

COLD CREEK CHRONICLE

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Mutton Bridge is a key link to the north of the municipality and the Mayor and members of council are acutely aware of and understand the inconvenience and frustration that this delay will create for the residents of the Township of Cramahe.

The unanticipated reply from the federal government July 17 which forced the delay of the beginning of construction resulted in a call from Cramahe Township Mayor Marc Coombs to Northumberland-Quinte West MP Rick Norlock requesting a site meeting "to seek his assistance in a timely resolution to the problem".

There was no debate at the July 27 site meeting at Mutton Bridge about whether Cold Creek is a navigable waterway.

After a quick look up and down the creek from Mutton Bridge, Northumberland-Quinte West MP Rick Norlock declared, from his experience, he thought the waterway could be navigated by a Kodiak or similar vessel, with a portage at the bridge.

The MP's comments seemed to put an end to the Township of Cramahe contention that the waterway was not navigable, and therefore did not need to meet federal Fisheries Department regulations about the size of the opening above the water line.

It also ended any hope that the MP might approach Transport Canada to make the township's case that it is only replacing an existing deck, or to intervene on its behalf.

Wayne Patterson of J. D. Jewell Engineering Ms. Alexander pointed out that the township is not altering the current support structure that has been in place over 70 years, only replacing the deck.

That did not move Mr. Norlock from his position.

It was clear in his responses to press questions and comments from township officials, he was not willing to enter an open discussion of the regulations, nor was he willing to discuss the limitations or application of the regulations being applied by the federal ministry after a helicopter survey of the creek.

He did hear Ms. Alexander reiterate the fact that the township only wishes to replace the deck, and her comments that school buses need to use the bridge daily.

He also heard township Works Superintendent Barry Thrasher explain the great hardship it has placed on area

farmers since August, 2006.

That prompted the MP to respond that the municipal, provincial and federal governments "all have rules for certain reasons" and to express his hope the township could work within the Fisheries and Oceans regulations for the bridge.

What he did promise was to work with his constituents to get the job done "the right way".

After 15 minutes on site, the MP retired from the scene to meet privately with township staff.

Later the same day, the Chronicle received notification from Ms. Alexander that Mr. Norlock will call Transport Canada to see if it can make the Mutton Bridge a priority. He won't tell federal staff to bump another project, but now that the township is this far along on the project he would like to see it get done.

He stated once more in the private meeting at the township offices he can't do anything about the Transport Canada rules and regulations.

Mr. Patterson will submit the engineering drawings for approval and the township will simply wait until it hears from the federal Ministry of Transport.

When asked at the morning meeting what he would do if the federal ministry failed to approve the drawings, Mr. Norlock answered, "We'll cross that bridge when we come to it if we can't live within the federal regulations."

For now, the contract has not been let and the eight week project to replace the deck is on hold.

While the space above the water level is ample to meet federal regulations, the width between any of the dam spans under the deck is not six metres. If the federal government adheres strictly to the six metre requirement between spans and the definition of the creek as a navigable waterway, the whole issue of the deck replacement becomes vastly more complicated and will have to be reconsidered by the township.

The Lower Trent Conservation Authority has been provided with drawings of the current plan and the township expects they will have no difficulty approving them. If new plans are required by the federal government they will have to be re-submitted for LTCA approval.

Mr. Patterson's assertion the township wanted work to begin this week and finished by the fall appears to be no longer viable. He is now hoping to see it done no later than mid-November, as is the MP.