

Municipal Council Update

By Steve Ferguson, Councillor for South Marysburgh

A very hectic month for council, all beginning with the well-attended Mayor's Levee at MacAulay Church on January 8th. The highlights of January's general activities included approving motions to place a moratorium on the closing of rural schools, an issue that is of great concern to council because our schools have been (and are) one of the foundations of our communities. Without them how will the municipality attract or keep young people? Although Athol/South Marysburgh School is not affected, you can expect to hear much more about this issue in the coming weeks.

We heard deputations from Andy LaCroix, the Executive Director of Stakeholder Relations at the newly opened Shorelines Casino in Belleville; Ken Howe representing the Emmanuel Affordable Seniors Co-housing Initiative was successful in receiving council's support to aid in securing funding from CMHC; the Save Picton Bay group represented by David MacKinnon, David MacKay and Victor Lind updated council of their concerns about Picton Terminals' business and its effect on the harbour; and Barbie and Bruce Cordick made a presentation regarding their concerns about vehicular traffic and other issues on the Millennium Trail. In addition, council was alerted by Councillor Jamie Forrester that Lion's Park in Cherry Valley was up for sale and that action should be taken to preserve this valuable public space.

Concerning matters of decisions council had to make, appointments were made to the Healthcare Advisory Committee and our own South Marysburgh recreation committee; and the Site Plan Control Agreement with the Sorbara Group for the Royal Hotel was passed. In spite of John Thompson's December deputation and the comments of several farmers, council supported staff recommendations and voted in favour of maintaining the 25% farm tax ratio for 2017. An OFA proposal to reduce the ratio to 20% would have had the net effect of all residential homeowners in PEC paying the difference. While all on council sympathize with farmers dealing with MPAC's higher assessment of farmland – particularly younger farmers – it was felt by many councillors that more information was required about relief programs before a change could be decided upon and implemented.

In addition to those activities, I was pleased to attend the Prince Edward County Memorial Hospital announcement along with Mayor Quaiff, MPP Todd Smith and other councillors and hear that we are that much closer to getting a new hospital in Picton. I was particularly proud that two South Marysburgh residents play such important roles in this vital initiative: Doug McGregor, as Chair of the QHC Board of Directors, and Monica Alyea, as President of the PECMH Foundation.

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I also attended the Chamber of Tourism's Mayor's Breakfast Briefing along with MP Neil Ellis and several other councillors. Flawlessly orchestrated and executed by South Marysburgh resident and chamber Executive Director, Emily Cowan, the breakfast was an opportunity for the mayor to brief the business community about his vision for the coming year as well as the accomplishments of 2016.

On January 27th the wpd/White Pines Wind Project ERT reconvened in Wellington to hear final summaries from the lawyers representing APPEC, wpd Canada and the director of the MOECC. In addition to their comments to the chair and co-chair of the tribunal, John Hirsch, representing himself, gave an exemplary presentation in defence of the south shore. Paula Peel of APPEC has written a report about the proceedings which is printed elsewhere in this month's Mirror.

Finally, I attended some of the events of this year's Winter Carnival including the pancake breakfast at the Town Hall. Sitting around the breakfast table or talking with local residents including Wilbur and Alice Miller, Randy York, Bill Cowan, Dick Jones and George and Sandra Emlaw, while supporting the Boy Scouts organization reminded me why I feel so lucky to live in such a community.

Have a terrific February!