

Beachers' News

Spring 2006 Newsletter

In Port Elgin, the sun is glistening off the rapidly melting snow and spring was definitely in the air at least for a few days. It won't be long until we're sweeping the detritus of winter from our decks and taking long walks along our gorgeous beach. It promises to be an interesting summer. Let's hope it's a hot one.

Big Box is on our doorstep

As those of you who keep track of local Saugeen Shores news will know, there is a proposal to rezone about 17 acres of land at the south end of Port Elgin on Hwy 21 (around the site of the old Home Hardware) to allow commercial highway development. Wal-Mart has purchased the site conditional on the rezoning. Apparently the plan for the Wal-Mart is that the store will be **100,000 to 120,000 square feet** (2.5 times the size of the old Independent and much larger than the stores in other similar communities such as Huntsville and Goderich). The plan calls for **883 parking spots** taking up **8 acres of land!** Quite apart from views we might have on big box development, we should be concerned about the traffic congestion this will cause for those of us that have our properties on and around Saugeen Beach Road.

Many of the permanent residents and business owners in Saugeen Shores are upset by the proposal and are mounting a campaign to stop the zoning amendment. They are asking for support from like-minded vacation property owners as well. It's a very controversial subject in town as there are also many residents that would welcome the Wal-Mart.

This week's Shoreline Beacon will include an op-ed piece by Laura Robinson, a local resident, articulating many of the reasons why such a development is not appropriate for a community such as Saugeen Shores. She describes the entrances to towns like ours as the porches and verandas of the town. **To place a characterless big box development on our veranda will turn away the very type of resident and business development that will make Saugeen Shores a vital, yet still unique and beautiful, shoreline community.**

In the draft official plan, the town committed to building a community that would have a strong and diverse economic base, as well as one that would continue to be attractive to tourists and vacation property owners like ourselves. For many of us, big box stores are the very antithesis of what attracts us to this community. These types of stores, particularly Wal-mart, have a devastating effect on the types of local business we are proud to support and which give the community the local character we love. With some vision and commitment Saugeen Shores could create a strong local economy that would provide all residents with all the access to the goods and services they need.

If you feel the same way, please write to the town councilors voicing your objection to any zoning of this property that would allow such a development. Also, you could sign and mail in the included Residents form of petition. If you have friends and relatives that are not property owners but visit or vacation in Port Elgin ask if they will send in the included "Friends" form of petition.

Send your petition to Town of Saugeen Shores | 600 Tomlinson Dr. | P.O. Box 820 | Port Elgin Ontario Canada N0H 2C0

Council members are Saugeen Shores Council Members Mayor Mark Kraemer, Deputy Mayor Mike Smith, Vice Deputy Mayor Doug Freiburger and Councillors Bill Henderson, Fred Schildroth, Thead Seaman, Duncan McCallum, Judy Ashbee and Doug Gowanlock

A public meeting is scheduled for April 6. Please see the attached notice. If there is any chance you could attend the meeting please do so.

Official Plan Update

The Official Plan has not yet been adopted by Council. The date of the statutory meeting has not yet been set, but it may be April 26. Check the town's website for further details.

Market Value Assessment

Some progress has been made by WRAFT in its fight to obtain a more fair tax regime for shoreline property owners. On March 1, MPP Tim Hudak, PC Finance Critic, introduced a private members bill to the legislature, proposing to cap future assessment increases at 5% per annum until there is an arms length change of ownership. While it does not provide any relief for tax increases experienced to date, including those resulting from the 2005 assessment, it brings the system under control for the future. If the bill became law and your 2006 assessment was up 30%, for tax purposes it could only go up by 5%. This makes future tax levels more predictable. WRAFT strongly supports the PC initiative and promised to work hard to help move it forward. For details of the bill go to http://www.ontla.on.ca/documents/Bills/38_Parliament/session2/b075_e.htm. It is only an opposition private members bill so passage is certainly not assured. Write to your MPP asking him or her to support Bill 75.

Property assessment complaints must be filed by March 3. Residents who disagree with their property assessment can file an annual assessment complaint with the Assessment Review Board (ARB) before March 31. If anyone disagrees with their property's assessed value, they can first file a Request for Reconsideration with the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC), which is a free service. MPAC Request for Reconsideration forms are available at the municipal office, MPAC offices, online at www.mpac.ca or by calling 1-866-296-6722. More tools to help you deal with property tax concerns can be found at: www.wraft.com/toolbox.

Your Beachers' membership dues help support WRAFT. To see what it has been doing in the past few months, visit its website at www.wraft.com.

CAW Wind Turbine

The Planning Department is recommending to council against the zoning amendment that would have allowed CAW to erect a wind turbine on its property. It was felt that the location was not appropriate, particularly given the proximity to residential neighbourhoods and the airport. Local environmentalists are also pleased given that it would have been in a bird migration path. The last word belongs to Council. Stay tuned!

Hydro Tree Pruning

Those of you who have not been to your properties over the winter may want to make a visit or have someone do so for you to determine if Hydro has marked any of your trees for removal this spring. They are culling a large number of trees that potentially interfere with power lines. They may have been a bit more aggressive than strictly necessary in marking the trees so you may want to take a look yourself. If you have a concern with respect to particular trees, Hydro has been quite willing to reconsider with respect to particular trees or to prune instead of removing the tree.

Do You Have Smoke Alarms in your Cottage?

Effective March 1, 2006, it is the law for all Ontario homes to have a working **smoke alarm** on every storey and outside all sleeping areas. The amendment covers cottages. See the full press release, including background information from the Ontario Fire Marshall, at: <http://www.foca.on.ca/indexcms/index.php?firereg>

Cottagers Supporting Cancer Survivors

Cottage Dreams, a program to lend a week at your cottage to a family touched by cancer, requests the support of associations like ours. This program enables families to visit cottages after winning the battle of their lives. Owner presentation kits are available upon request. Please contact the organization at (705) 457-9100 or visit www.cottagedreams.org if you would like to help.

Annual Meeting

This year the Beachers annual meeting will be held on Aug 5 at the Plex at 10:00 a.m. If you have an interest in serving on the board, please let any of the board members or our manager, Tina Hill, know.

If you have not yet provided Tina with your email address, please do so. This allows us to contact you more quickly with time sensitive information about the goings on in Saugeen Shores. Also, one of the organization's biggest costs is the cost of mailing, so any help you can give to reduce that cost is much appreciated.

See you on the beach!