

REES' Pieces

A new decade, A new era

When I originally sat down to write this column I intended my opening question to be, "Are we entering a new Era? After a few words appeared on the screen, I changed it to "We have entered a new era!

Not only has Premier McNeil set the framework to transition the forest sector he has changed politics. Who would have thought a politician would stand by their word and fulfill a five year old promise? McNeil's announcement on December 20, 2019 surprised and devastated many people, but it is proof he placed more importance on integrity than making a political decision.

For decades people have been of the opinion, multinational forestry companies were dictating to the government of the day; massive clear cutting was not appropriate; jobs mattered more than the economy and although things should change, no leader had the guts to make a tough decision.

On December 20th, Premier McNeil proved them wrong on all counts.

As difficult as his decision might be, he has taken the bull by the horns and shook it for the long term betterment environmentally, economically and his decision might help restore confidence in elected officials.

His decision was a call to action for everyone to participate to "transition" the province from where it is, to a better place. The closure of the Northern Pulp facility need not be the end of the world, although it will create two to three years of hardship.

We are all to blame for our situation – Nova Scotians have not appreciated the value of forest land owned by over 30,000 private owners and how it should be the primary economic engine of rural Nova Scotia.

In last month's issue, we published a comparison of forestry in Nova Scotia Vs Finland. Before we go off blaming McNeil for short term economic disruption, let's review some of the comparisons, which demonstrate Nova Scotia has not been a leader in forestry. We have not been reaping the benefits of "best practices".

Finland is five times the size and has five times the population. Nova Scotia has been under performing Finland which has 14 times the number of forestry related jobs; 17 times the annual harvest and 32 times the export value of its forest products. Additionally, Finlanders respect and value their forests. Finland has a management program and knows the inventory of private woodland and the state of the forests. They also know how much is harvested each year. We are not even close.

Harvesting yield is much higher in Finland. Finland has an annual harvest of 68-M cubic meters whereas Nova Scotia claims 4-M cubic meters. The data provided by a five person delegation of forest professionals following a 2016 study trip to Finland tells much more about Nova Scotia's approach to forestry. None of their findings have found their way into or even a start to redevelopment of forestry practices and policy in this province.

Before we go into total depression suggesting not one tree will be cut in Nova Scotia, let's look back 25+ years when we were running around like chickens with their heads cut off suggesting the Cod Moratorium would cause every boat to come out of the water and not one more fish come out of the water.

Yes, Nova Scotia is in for a couple of years of rough going.

Our ultimate success will be to change focus. Nova Scotia has some of the best forestry professionals. It's time for them to come together; put the shoulder to the wheel and develop a plan which will help us reap more benefits than we have in the last century. I don't know all the "ins" and "outs" but perhaps the most important first few steps is to find a market for the chips generated at the sawmills. A significant portion could be exported, while we find solutions to how to incorporate their usage into new value-added facilities. For others affected by Northern Pulp's closure, it might be warranted to implement a strong silviculture program to grow better forests, when we are back up to speed.

Maurice

Letters to the editor

This is an open forum for your opinions and comments.

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Questions to Ask

By Maurice Rees

Over the holiday season, when Colchester Municipal Council was taking a slower pace that did not stop coffee shop talk from continuing in earnest. Sometimes it is prudent to just sit and listen to some of the conversations at the tables around you.

Because press releases or announcements have not been issued, as a journalist, it is not possible to develop a news article based on those subjects. As a result, I have taken some of those next table discussions and converted them into questions, which Colchester residents could or are asking among their network.

So here goes:
Why is council and Town of Truro spending \$100,000 on a consultant's study regarding seating arrangements at the RECC?

Is it connected to Insurance Company demands for rectification of situations existing since construction phases?

Which fabricating company has been asked to design stair railings for in the lower bowl at the RECC?

How many spectators have fallen on the RECC steps and have lodged complaints or lawsuits?

Is any of this as a result of a pending lawsuit, which could result in a pay-out ranging from \$200,000 to \$500,000?

Will council adopt the template of the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities Code of Conduct at its January meeting on January 31, 2019?

What happened to Colchester Council's code of conduct draft prepared over two years ago?

Does the two year old draft have more teeth than the NSFM version?

If the NSFM version is much weaker, as reported, have councillor's done anyone a favour other than possibly putting their self interest ahead of the taxpayers and staff during an election year?

How hard will the Human Rights Commission push on the complaint lodged against Councillor Pash?

As part of any potential ruling by Human Rights Commission how much sensitivity

training will councillors and staff be required to take?

With 2020 being a municipal election year, which councillors will not re-offer?

Which existing councillors might face challenger's in their districts?

Will anyone challenge Mayor Blair for the top job?

Will council move forward, or announce a study to determine the future of the Debert Airport?

Which councillors are adamant extensive Debert development should be considered,?

Which councillors don't want any money spent on the airport and or the business park?

These are just some of the coffee cup conversations hear from around Colchester over the holidays. After sitting there and listening, I have a good idea of what the electorate are thinking to their friends. They say more business is done at coffee shops, that in the board rooms. I tend to believe it, because some of the solutions seems more practical that what happens in public domain.

Council Planning for Municipal Election

By Maurice Rees

Plans are underway for the October 2020 municipal election. At its committee meeting on December 12th council delegated responsibility for the recruitment of the Returning Officer and Assistant Returning Officer(s) to the CAO so that the CAO can undertake the recruitment process and have candidate(s) in place by March 15th, 2020 on motions by Mayor Blair and Councillor Pash.

Council also discussed how to increase voter turnout and if electronic voting should be part of the voting options. Councillor Taggart asked to maintain current paper ballot process, whereas other councillors suggested electronic voting is becoming more acceptable and perhaps there could be two options. Basically council settled on receiving a presentation on electronic voting, but not a session from a vendor wanting to sell a service. Councillor Parker mentioned if council does not look at electronic voting, it is "staying behind in a digital world". Councillor Boutilier said, "Let's not delay. Electronic voting will engage voters". Councillor Gibbs said he would like to know the costs involved.

By way of practice, the Returning Officer for the Municipality of the County of Colchester (the Municipality) submits a report to Council following each municipal election which chronicles the scope and nature of their efforts relative to the preparation, execution and analysis of the municipal election. Additionally, the report also serves to provide recommendations as to how the election process can be further improved and/or modified in response to the identified recommendations.

With respect to the most recent municipal election (October 2016), the Municipality's Returning Officer (Lorraine Dawson) submitted her report to Council on January 26, 2017. After discussing the post-election report, Council directed the CAO to bring forth the report for further consideration prior to the next municipal election (October 2020).

In addition to the opportunity for Council to revisit the post-election report, it is also acknowledged that a number of other key considerations need to be addressed once the planning process for the October 2020 election begins.



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