

REES' Pieces

Will the grass get mowed in Five Islands?

August is normally a slow news month, except for accidents and major instances, because most of the newsmakers, their staff or the public are on holidays. However, this August has been different. News or issue activity is being driven primarily by Nova Scotia Utility and Review Board, Nova Scotia Power, Emera and the provincial government. The former NewPage mill in Port Hawkesbury is central to all.

There's been enough material to keep one busy full-time in terms of research, gathering analysis, or collecting opinions.

Almost every conversation I've had with people after the traditional comments about the weather, turns to frustration over what appears to be a constant flow of applications for rate increases, by Nova Scotia Power. But this summer Nova Scotia Power is also more in the news because of ongoing negotiations on Port Hawkesbury's idle pulp mill and will it ever re-open?

This summer it's either been someone applying to take more money out of the consumer's pocket, or the provincial government handing out \$-millions more of our money. It's hard for families who are barely squeaking by, or living off their line of credit to feel optimistic when they have change in their pockets while others are talking in the millions.

One had to wonder what the Stern Brother's next request will be to open the mill. Recently, the province has come up with \$124.5-million; approval has been granted for lower than normal power rate and a request for complicated tax savings has been asked of Canada Revenue Agency. Many speculate, Ottawa will not grant the request, because it would open up floodgates many companies would seek.

After everyone thought the complete request list was fulfilled, the Stern Brothers company applied to the URB to reduce its municipal property tax bill from over \$2-million to approximately \$500,000.

If the mill does reopen, granted approximately half of the previous staff will have jobs. Woodlot contractors, truckers and field personnel will have jobs, but the municipality in which they reside would have to curtail services. The Port Hawkesbury mill's tax bill accounted for 40% of tax revenues.

Imagine how that will affect delivery of services. Will the municipality have a staff?

Late last week, Port Hawkesbury's Mayor Billy Joe MacLean who has been very supportive and at the centre of the pressure points to see the mill re-opened started to ask questions. The tone of media reports indicate he is suggesting the URB not reduce the tax bill. When is enough enough?

It's a rough situation when a single business accounts for almost half of revenues. It makes them too big to fail, but at some point pouring in more money has to stop.

I certainly hope no other area is every faced with such a heart-wrenching situation. Imagine the chaotic situation for Colchester or Truro if one tax paying customer wanted to go from 40% of tax revenues to 10%. Any municipality would be in chaos.

The Truro economy seems to be consistent according to rental occupancy rates surveys. It's doing much better than many other areas around the province. Developers seem to be closely guarding those occupancy rates to keep rental fees up and not allowing a sudden increase in commercial or residential space. But it also speaks well of the Colchester economy, which has always had a reputation for consistency.

Some people in the Five Islands area are not happy. Many of them worked hard for a permanent location for the Lighthouse and were elated when 22 acres was donated to the municipality and the municipality stepped up to the plate to move the lighthouse to its new home and establish a park.

Pressure has been put on District 10 councillor, Tom Taggart to have the grass around the lighthouse mowed regularly. Tom's been working on the matter, but some reports I've received indicate municipal staff wish to maintain the area in a natural state, as an un-manicured coastal area. Residents feel so strong that several have written letters to the editor, which are published on Page 4.

It is anticipated the matter will be resolved before or during the August 30th council meeting.

Maurice

Letters to the editor

This is an open forum for your opinions and comments.

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Dear Editor:

A number of us neighbours would like to see the grass around the Five Islands Lighthouse mowed for appearance sake, safety's sake (fire) and an area to play the washer toss game.

We are also in need of water as tourists have no place to wash when coming up from the mud-flats or digging clams.

Sincerely yours,

Jo-Ann Hunter, Chris Millard,
Laura Amos, Reagan
Arsenault, Diane Richard, Ivan
Richard, and Michaela Folks

Dear Editor:

As a member of the Five Islands Lighthouse Preservation Society, I am very concerned about the tall grass around our lighthouse. The drop of a match or a cigarette butt and we will lose our lighthouse.

Some businesses and visitors have complained it looks messy and would look nicer if mowed like the rest of it.

After all it is a park.

The lighthouse society has agreed it they will let us mow the rest of it, we could assist in the cost.

Sincerely yours,

Mina Berry, Secretary,
Five Island Lighthouse Society

Dear Editor:

I would like to have the grass mowed around Five Islands Lighthouse, because of the unsightly appearance of the park.

Also it is a fire hazard. If someone drops a lit cigarette or match, we could lose our lighthouse.

It is a park and appearance means a lot.

Diane Richard, Member
Five Islands Lighthouse
Preservation Society.

Dear editor,
SPEAK UP FOR RURAL
MAIL DELIVERY

This summer, even more rural Nova Scotians will have to adjust to a new reality of traveling to pick up their mail.

While it may seem like a minor inconvenience for some, for people living in rural communities, and especially for seniors in those communities, the change from home delivery to centralized group mailboxes could have a real impact on their personal safety and quality of life.

When winter hits and the roads freeze, rural Nova Scotians will be forced to

risk their well-being when retrieving their mail—braving narrow, icy roads and dangerous weather. And those without access to a vehicle will have to find alternative means.

Many seniors in rural communities - particularly those who don't drive and have difficulty walking - rely on home mail delivery as a point of contact to the outside world. They not only rely on the mail for personal letters and commercial goods, but also for income payments and important financial statements. This is a primary reason why we still consider mail delivery to be an essential service for all Canadians. The Conservative government should not allow Canada Post to alter delivery service in a way that compromises the safety of its customers, or impedes the ability of Canadians who have difficulty driving or walking from getting their mail.

The Conservatives' decision to limit rural mail delivery has Nova Scotians of all political stripes concerned and speaking out. Recently, former Progressive Conservative Premier Roger Bacon threatened to cut up his membership to the federal Conservatives if action is not taken. Mr. Bacon agrees that group mailboxes represent a threat to the personal safety of the province's rural seniors.

Box-to-box rural and roadside mail services must be preserved, and it is the responsibility of the federal government to do so. It is time that the Conservatives listen to rural Nova Scotians and reverse these dangerous changes.

Scott Brisson
MP for Kings-Hants
Liberal Finance Critic

Dear Editor

After listening to the Premier Darrell Dexter's report this morning and digesting it my conclusion is still the same. All private land contractors are still out in the cold in a ship with out a sail.

All crown land contractors are still cutting and shipping pulpwood. Also, the majority of crown land contractors have been allocated crown blocks of wood to start cutting on when the mill starts operating again. Presently, there are Crown land contractors who are being sent to the Cape

Breton highlands to start cutting 8 foot softwood, in anticipation of the Point Tupper mill opening.

I feel that we live in a third world country, to have this double tier operation, consisting of have and have not contractors. But, no, surprisingly enough, we live in Nova Scotia, Canada where the government claims to be treating all its citizens equal. What a joke to be treated like second class citizens.

As a private land contractor we can not go to a land owner and ask about cutting their wood at this time as we have no market or know how much we will be able to offer the woodlot owner for stumpage. As we have no idea how much we will be getting paid for roadside pulpwood.

We (ENSPWP - Eastern Nova Scotia Pulpwood Producers) met with a DNR bureaucrat on May 23rd, 2012 to discuss these issues.

We left that meeting, cautiously optimistic that our concerns would be addressed. Three months later, absolutely nothing has changed. Therefore, we can only believe that it is DNR's mandate or directive to do absolutely nothing to address our concerns.

I was at the understanding that one of the purposes of the Forest Infrastructure Fund (FIF) was to keep the harvesting infrastructure in place for if and when the Port Hawkesbury Paper (PHP) mill re-opens to start buying wood. By deliberately refusing to include private land contractors in this survival plan, many private land contractors will continue to quit the business. I will suggest that their harvesting infrastructure will be severely handicapped when and if the PHP mill starts up.

The impression I have been receiving from Marc Dube and DNR staff is that we are all going to be just pulpwood contractors no more crown or private status.

If Pulpwood Contractor is going to be the future title for all harvesting contractors, let us all start now and then we can stop twiddling our thumbs. DNR must make the FIF money available for all harvesting contractors. Stop giving preferred treatment and preferred status to one portion of the harvesting infrastruc-

ture.

If everyone was being treated equally as a harvesting contractor, then we would all be on the same page. We would be all working.

This government program is creating very unfair market conditions.

This is how I interpret what is going on in our forest industry in eastern Nova Scotia between our provincial government, Department of Natural Resource, Port Hawkesbury Paper woodland staff, crown land and private land wood suppliers.

Sincerely Russell Huntington
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or Email:
mbpulp@allstream.net

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