

Cottage Associations Band Together

by Liz Danielsen (the County Voice – 11 June 2009)

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Last Saturday the Coalition of Haliburton Associations (CHA) held its first official meeting and has formed an executive and a number of committees. Twenty-nine representatives of property owners’ associations from across all four municipalities in the County gathered at the Stanhope Firefighters Community Centre to take part in establishing a formal structure.

The coalition’s inaugural president will be Duncan McCallum. McCallum, who is the outgoing President of the Kennisis Lake Cottage Owners’ Association, was acclaimed by the coalition members.

McCallum says that he is delighted to be part of this new and forward thinking organization. “We have several interesting projects already in the works, the most immediate of which is the creation of the lake area property owners’ manual aimed at giving stakeholders access to all kinds of useful information.”

The executive will consist of members who will chair CHA committees including Margaret Clayton (Salerno/Devil’s Lake) as Secretary, Napier Simpson (Maple, Beech and Cameron Lakes Area Property Owners Association) who will chair the Advocacy and Development Committee, Paul MacInnes (also MBC) will chair the Marketing and Outreach Committee, Stephen Foster (Loon Lake) will co-chair the Advocacy and Development Committee, Dennis Choptiany (Koshlong) will chair the Committee responsible for Information Technology and, last but certainly not least, Don Benson (Mountain Lake) will chair the Environment Committee.

Paul MacInnes said, “It was a fantastic meeting and we’re very pleased that we have some structure. There was a lot of excitement about getting organized from representatives who had been at previous meetings and lots of interest and questions from new representatives.” MacInnes said that a number of new lake associations were represented that hadn’t been at their first two meetings and that interest was continuing to grow.

“As a group we decided on a very simple organizational structure with a President, a Secretary and the Chairs of a small number of committees. Each committee got tremendous response and there are a number of people who sit on several committees. Each committee has an excellent group of people and we’re looking forward to their input.”

According to MacInnes there was also a very positive reaction from everyone about the property owner’s manual that is being developed. He said, “They see tremendous potential in the manual and everyone wants

to get involved.”

The handbook will address issues like septic system maintenance, fishing and hunting rules, local information, lake stewardship and ecological property management. It will eventually reach the hands of all of the 10,000 plus lake area property owners in the Haliburton Highlands.

“One of the biggest challenges to every association is facing more work than they have volunteers to achieve. The key mandate for the coalition is setting out to save time and resources for each of its member organizations through the synergies of information sharing and coordinated group efforts, and it’s already happening through the sharing of newsletter content which can take hours to research and prepare.

MacInnes emphasized the fact that once representatives gained a full understanding, not only about the purpose of the lake area property owners’ manual, but more importantly the benefits that would accrue to the members of the coalition, joining became an easy decision.

“Everyone was very excited about the potential that the manual has for a positive environmental impact, for saving each of the associations time and for the capability of revenue generation through advertising in the manual. There have been discussions with a number of realtors in the area who have been uniformly positive about the project as well.”

CHA is hoping to reach agreements with as many realtors in the area as possible to provide the lake associations with information about the sale/transfer of properties on their lake. With the purchaser’s permission, the realtors would present the purchasers with a copy of the property owner’s manual as a form of welcome, along with a one-year membership to the association. This step alone will save each association considerable time and effort and give new cottage owners all of the information they need about their lake, their municipality and their environment.

So far the CHA has agreed that they will not become involved in political issues, but according to MacInnes there was some interesting discussion during the course of their meeting about that. “Some members, particularly several new to the coalition were disappointed that we would not be involved in political issues. They felt it would be difficult to do anything truly positive if we weren’t involved.”

According to MacInnes, presentations were given about uranium mining and exploration, field application of septage and the proposed Stanhope runway expansion. These issues in themselves are political in nature.

MacInnes said, “Our mandate has not changed, but the executive committee may have to look at that. Not one person spoke to support the point of view that we shouldn’t be involved. Where there are concerns

about septage and municipalities have come to a standstill with government agencies, we could lobby the minister responsible in efforts to get something done.”

In addition Don Benson, as the Chair of the Environment Committee will represent CHA during meetings to review the County’s Official Plan.

The role for the Marketing and Outreach Committee will include all coalition communications. MacInnes said that it was their goal to try to get 95 percent of the property owners associations in the County to join the coalition.

When asked if the CHA had discussed future projects, MacInnes said that McCallum had been clear in his desire to tackle the projects that are presently underway and do them well before moving on to new projects.

“A number of the committees were formed literally minutes prior to the end of the meeting. We held a bit of debate about the validity of each committee and the appointments made. Now each committee needs to meet and formulate how they would like to go forward.

“We need to concentrate on expanding our membership and getting our organization set up. The executive as the governance group has to set up by-laws for the organization and that in itself is a big project. We will continue to reach out to other associations that we haven’t been able to contact so far and continue with the lake area property owners’ manual.”

“The capability of disseminating information has increased dramatically as well as our access to contact information. The whole issue of communications is huge for us and these things alone represent a huge step forward. People hearing that there is a coalition are tickled to be able to get their information out.”

MacInnes said there was talk from the Environment Committee of getting all of the lake stewards together to share best practices. Another issue that is under consideration is finding a way to bridge a compromise with the municipalities on how existing and future lake plans will coincide with or become part of municipal Official Plans.

An excellent beginning to that challenge is Benson’s work with the County during their planning process. Even incorporating the fundamentals of the lake plans as a whole into the municipal OP’s could prove to be a challenge, but something to continue to work towards.

MacInnes said that the work of Napier Simpson had been extraordinary in getting the coalition off the

ground. Simpson came up with the idea for the coalition and has been a driving force since its inception a year ago.

Stay tuned for progress updates on this very interesting addition to Haliburton County.