

Eco-friendly locals meet at town hall

By Sarah Sobanski

The government of Canada, unlike in the past, is looking to consult with Canadians on what they want to see in a climate change plan, Hastings-Lennox and Addington MP Mike Bossio explained, speaking to Bancroft and surrounding area community members who turned up at the 508 centre last week.

Climate change is reality, it's happening. I don't think anyone can disagree with that any longer. We know that carbon is a piece of the puzzle. We can either be a part of the problem or a part of the solution.

The gathering was a part of a series of town-hall type meetings that Bossio is holding to better understand the concerns of the community - the next to be held Aug. 18. He told attendees early that the meeting was not a question and answer period between him and the public, but a chance for those gathered to participate in an open conversation about climate change with each other.

Canada is among the top three in green house gas (GHG) emitters per capita. In 2011, the average Canadian produced double the global average of gas emissions per person.

We all need to work together to put together the plan, addressed Bossio, speaking to Ontario's Climate Change Action Plan. Not everybody is going to like the plan, but the goal is to achieve that 1.5 degree mark.

A global climate change summit in Paris last December saw over 195 countries including Canada commit to a legally binding deal to halt climate change before it reaches two degrees.

Studies suggest that the consequences of a two degree increase in the global climate could result in irreversible damage to life as it is today. Sea levels would continue to rise to swallow entire cities, crop yields would falter and fail and floods, droughts and severe weather would become increasingly regular. Scientists debate that the climate has already increased between one degree and 1.5 degrees.

Many attendees were long-time cottagers of the area. They discussed what they have seen happen over the course of their lives in the area including area lakes thawing more quickly, warmer water temperatures and new and a higher frequency of forest diseases and invasive species.

One woman expressed her concern that the changes in area lakes promoted algae growth. She suggested that blue-green algae could wipe out an entire lake community making it toxic to native species and cottagers alike.

A couple who've lived off-grid in a local cabin for over 40 years theorized that changing modern habits could contribute to slowing climate change. They suggested people needed to give up their modern comforts.

One of the most important sacrifices that we need to make is we can't have everything as instant as we want, said one man. We've used half the oil on the planet, we need to find a new energy source. Stop air conditioning. We in this room are sitting in comfort because we don't like the climate outside.

All I see are big trucks, a woman spoke in agreement later. [They have] one person in them for recreational purposes. That's only happened over the last 20 years. We have to learn how to change. The federal government has to change that [but] it's hard to tell people what to drive.

Others weren't convinced simple lifestyle changes would help for the big picture. They called for legislation to restrict habits that are bad for the environment even if it would make the current federal government unpopular for reelection.

Others sent the government a message to stop asking them to make environmentally friendly decisions that would bankrupt them.

One woman related she had installed a geothermal heating and cooling system for her home - better known as ground-heating - later she recalled she was reduced to tears after she received a \$3,000 hydro bill. She said she wanted to be green, but it was difficult.

Forget about the oil, forget about the pipelines, let's look at the people, those people who are struggling to make ends meet because of a dysfunctional energy program, said one man.

Attendees called for legislation that would help them afford environmentally friendly infrastructure.

We need bylaws that support smaller homes not larger homes. Enough monster homes, they take way too much of our natural resources every year, said another woman. We need to listen to the people who are retiring, and young people who want a smaller place. We don't need to have a square foot minimum.

Hastings Highlands recently allowed tiny home building. Before, living structures under 800 square feet couldn't be fully equipped with municipal industry like running water. Now, fully functioning homes can be built in marginal agricultural zones under 800 square feet.

Concerns and ideas suggested by the public were transcribed and taken back to Ottawa.

Bossio suggested every idea and opinion was worthy of consideration.

?Everybody has their own opinions about their position. We have to be respectful towards each others' opinions because that is the only way we can find a common vision,? said Bossio.