

For the common good

By Chris Drost

When an individual throws their hat into the ring for a political position, or puts their name forth to fill a vacant seat, it comes with the expectation that that person will do their best for the common good. Public office is not the place to further your own personal agenda.

This past week, Wollaston council received the report authored by the Friends of Nellie Lunn, a 47-page detailed document that thoroughly addresses all the misconceptions about the property being unsuitable for a non-motorized trail, the fact that there is public access through the unopened road allowance and that according to the Crowe Valley Conservation Authority, a walking trail would be a compatible use of the property with minimal impact on any of the wetlands or environmentally sensitive areas.

The positive economic impact of further developing the hiking trails at Nellie Lunn has already been identified through the Wollaston Community-Based Strategic Plan and through publications from Hastings Destination Trails Inc. The report suggests that one option is to start by forming a management group for the park made up of one individual from the Friends of Nellie Lunn, one additional community member and a council representative, who could work together as a committee of council. Another suggested option is to use the example of the Stewards of Bancroft Eagles Nest Park, a not-for-profit organization that has a memorandum of understanding with the Town of Bancroft and works to care for the trail system and other infrastructure in the park, as well as provide educational nature programming.

Council's initial stance was that the funds raised from selling the property could be put aside for the future building of a new fire hall in Coe Hill. This report points out that this does not seem in line with the township's current efforts to forge a fire services agreement with two other nearby municipalities. There is also no fire hall plan and budget in place so how can a proper analysis be done to determine whether or not giving up the township's most important recreational asset is indeed worth it? The Friends of Nellie Lunn took this one step further and investigated other municipalities that have been able to secure funds for a new fire hall without selling off prime municipal real estate.

There are a lot of details in the report. Some may be missing as some information was not received from the municipality until the day the report was actually due. Two efforts to secure an extension to allow for this information to be included were dismissed by council. Only Councillor Michael Fuerth and Councillor Jeff Swartman voted to allow an extension at the most recent council meeting, but that was not enough.

At this point two things need to happen. One, is that the good people of Wollaston Township contact their mayor and council and let them know how and why they should not vote to sell Nellie Lunn Park when it comes for a vote on Dec. 13. The second is that each member of council takes the time to actually read this document from the Friends of Nellie Lunn, carefully, and in its entirety, keeping in mind that it was assembled with considerable effort by members of the community.

It was not something that was sent off for a consultant to prepare. It was investigated and written by a number of concerned residents who have made the effort to take a stance about something they deem to be very important for their community.

Selling Nellie Lunn Park would be a short-sighted decision. Let's hope that Wollaston council comes to its senses and thinks about the common good when it makes its decision on Dec. 13.