

Wollaston council votes to defer decision on Nellie Lunn Park

By Kristena Schutt-Moore

In a vote of Wollaston council at their Aug. 9 online meeting, the decision was unanimous to defer a vote on the sale of the gifted park lands for three months to give interested stakeholders time to organize and bring forward a viable plan to develop and maintain the park.

Bernice Crocker, Wollaston clerk administrator, provided a memo to council dated Aug. 9 in which she provided a chronology of motions included in the minutes regarding the Nellie Lunn property since it was gifted to the township in 1981.

Since the previous council meeting on July 26, Crocker spoke to Andrew Redden, manager of economic and tourism development and Justin Harrow, director of planning of the County of Hastings. Redden indicated that if the township decides to donate or sell the land or donate it to a not-for-profit organization, he may be able to provide the township with some contact information.

Crocker also contact Emily Galloway, a planner at the County of Hastings. She stated that there appears to be a wet area not included in the Environmental Protection portion of the property and recommended that Crowe Valley be contacted. Crocker has not heard back from them yet.

A list of costs related to minor upgrades to Nellie Lunn Park were also enclosed in the council package. These numbers came from research Crocker did for a Rural Economic Development grant, to the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, in January of this year. Those costs were estimated at approximately \$60,000.

Crocker also noted in her memo that a proposal has been received from the Bancroft Area Stewardship Council suggesting a possible partnership and collaboration with the Township of Wollaston.

Numerous emails were also received by Crocker, including one from Dale Barrett with a petition of 500 names attached. (currently at 852) Crocker's report included a presentation by the Friends of Nellie Lunn Park who were on hand with a delegation at the Aug. 9 meeting. The group's slide presentation reviewed a number of reasons why more time should be taken to review the options for this ?once in a lifetime? opportunity with Nellie Lunn Park. They stressed that it should not have to be a choice between keeping the park and having a new firehall. Instead, it should be about having both. ?We want to get to the point of ?and? and not ?or,? said Friend's member J.D. Fentie.

Other members of the Friends of Nellie Lunn spoke about the outpouring of community support on social media and the petition. Karen Fleece, a 20-year resident on Urbach Lake spoke about the gift of the property and that they have been in contact with the donor's family. Speaking of his grandmother, Nellie Lunn, her grandson said, ?Let my grandmother's memory grow like the trees, strong and tall like my grandmother who was nearly six feet tall.? Friend's member Naomi said she lives on the lake and it is one of the few places you can enjoy and hear the sounds of nature. ?Seven and a half per cent of the property are wetlands, it is zoned RU with about 12 per cent EP.?

The group asked council to defer a decision for nine months to prepare the business case and ?to clarify the issues for the public and develop possible alternative solutions in order to come to a legally, ethically and socially responsible solution.?

Following the presentation by the Friends of Nellie Lunn, Councillor Jeff Swartman indicated he had already put forward a motion to defer the decision about Nellie Lunn for six months but would be open to listening.

Mayor Lynn Kruger expressed concern about the many trespassing issues on the property and asked The Friends how they will address that. J.D. Fentie, one of the members of the Friends group, replied that trespassing could definitely be addressed in the business case.

Kruger again stressed that the trespassing puts the township at a liability. "Until there is a solid plan or solution, it is bad optics," she said. In response, Fentie suggested time could be spent early in the process to speak with Kruger and others to fully understand the issues.

Deputy Mayor Darlene Colton reminded that the township's strategic plan is a living document and just because something is in it does not mean it could not be changed.

Councillor Jay Morrison said that when the economic development committee did a report on Nellie Lunn that "we found there was nothing we could do with this property and I have heard no one mention it." He encouraged people to talk with Fred Cox and get a tour of the property. "That would be very helpful. We have seen the conclusions of report but it would be good to see more detail of what went into the report," said Fentie. The Friend's, Sheila Currie noted that the Friends of Nellie Lunn did refer to the report in their accompanying materials.

Kruger said that this property is not a "park" but rather a "preserve." She also expressed that there is a lot of environmentally protected areas in there as well which brings this property to a crawl or a stop. In response, Fentie said, "having clarity on the environmental protection is important to address as part of this discovery process."

After further discussion later in the meeting, council voted to defer a vote on the sale of the property for three months to give interested stakeholders time to organize and bring forward a viable plan to develop and maintain the park. "I think we owe it to the stakeholders to give them time and I think we need to listen to them," said Councillor Swartman.

Council also passed a motion to request that on all social media pages and websites that Nellie Lunn Park be removed as a place to visit until it is known whether it is to be kept or sold. Signage leading to Nellie Lunn will also be covered. In the interim, Nellie Lunn Park will remain closed to everyone.