

COMMUNITY OF KINGSTON
NEWSLETTER

OFFICIAL PLAN AND BYLAW REVIEW

Background

Due to increasing concerns in our community about the control of major developments such as C&D sites, compost plants, motorcycle tracks, etc. and other land use and development issues, Kingston Community Council made the decision in 2011 to pursue the preparation and adoption of our own Official Plan and Development Bylaw.

The first step was to approach the Federal/Provincial Infrastructure Secretariat for funding assistance. With funding support secured Council issued a tender to local planning consultants. The tender was finally awarded to a highly experienced planner, Philip Wood of P. Wood & Associates.

Council then appointed a Planning Committee to oversee the project, with members from Council and the community at large. The first action recommended by the Committee was the adoption of an Interim Planning Policy and an Interim Development Bylaw which would give Council the authority over all local development during the plan preparation period.

A newsletter was circulated describing the process and a very well attended public meeting was held. At this meeting local residents provided a very strong level of support for the planning process.

Shortly after that date a draft Interim Planning Policy and Interim Development Bylaw was submitted to Minister, Wes Sheridan for his approval. Since early 2012 Kingston Council has been approving all development and

subdivision of land within our community.

Recent Progress

The first stage of preparing an Official Plan is the preparation of base mapping and the preparation of various background reports. Much of this work is well underway and the Planning Committee has met on a number of occasions.

The next and most critical step, is community engagement. The Planning Act only legally requires one formal public meeting to review a proposed Official Plan and Development Bylaw. Kingston Council and our Planning Committee is committed to a much more active public consultation process.

Council had originally hoped to have a draft Plan ready for presentation to the public by this Summer. Unfortunately, the transition of development control authority from the Provincial Government has proven more complex than we imagined and has delayed our process.

Council has now determined that public meetings during the Summer vacation period are unacceptable, so the final meetings have now been postponed until September.

Community Engagement

The first step in engaging our residents in the Official Plan process has been the creation of a number of FOCUS GROUPS. These groups involve local volunteers who have been assembled to help the Planning Committee identify local issues and to discuss possible land use policy options.

This exercise has proven very productive. Three different FOCUS GROUPS were formed including: 1) a committee of both new and long term residents; 2) a committee of local farmers; and 3) a committee of people concerned or active in Watershed Management. These FOCUS GROUPS have taken their work very seriously. The Farmers' group met once, the Residents' group met twice and the Watershed group met three times. It was apparent that many of those involved would have continued to meet if requested to do so.

The intent of these FOCUS GROUPS, however, was primarily to inform the Planning Committee on local issues and to provide a foundation for our broad based Public Forums where the entire community would be asked to participate.

Public Forum

Our first PUBLIC FORUM will be held on June 25th at 7:00 pm at the EMYVALE RECREATION CENTRE on the Kingston Road, just west of Peters Road.

At this meeting the Planning Committee intends to present a summary of the Plan process to date and to discuss the feedback from the FOCUS GROUPS, and any other land use or development issues which are raised from the floor. Ideally we hope that the FOCUS GROUP participants will want to speak about what they have learned.

This is the first of two or three Public Forums. At least one more will be held in the Fall at which time we hope to be able to present some potential policy options for debate.

At the end of this process the Planning Act requires a formal Public Meeting to present the draft Official Plan and Development Bylaw, and for Council to solicit comments

from the public. We will also be holding an Open House prior to this Public Meeting where our Planning Consultant and members of the Planning Committee will be available to meet one on one with residents to discuss the draft documents and answer individual questions. We also expect to prepare at least one more Newsletter prior to the Open House.

This process is far in excess of the level of public consultation required under the Planning Act but Council and the Planning Committee want to ensure that the maximum opportunity for public consultation is achieved.

We will also be posting all background documents on the Community's website at www.kingston.pei.ca

What Have We Learned to Date

If you go onto the Kingston website you will be able to review the minutes of all 6 FOCUS GROUP meetings. Here is a summary of some of the key areas of concern or discussion:

1) When talking to members of Council, participants in the FOCUS GROUPS or those who attended the first public meeting, it is clear that our residents place a high value on Kingston's rural character and the area's natural beauty. Maintaining these qualities appears to be a high priority for many.

2) On a similar note, a number of people stressed the fact that they moved to (or stayed in) Kingston because they didn't want to live in an urban or suburban community. We heard concerns expressed about wanting to avoid: high traffic volumes and congestion; lack of connection with your neighbours (sense of "community"); high tax rates and utility rates, etc.

3) Land use conflicts appear to be a concern for everyone, as evidenced by the turn out for the C&D site meeting. One of the major benefits of having our own Official Plan and Development Bylaw is the ability to place firm restrictions on land uses like: C&D sites; compost and other waste storage facilities; heavy noxious industries such as asphalt plants; motorcycle tracks; auto body and auto salvage facilities; intensive livestock operations, etc.

4) There appears to be a general appreciation that the quality of our rural landscape in many respects is tied to the health of our farming community. While the number of full time farmers has declined significantly, there is strong support for responsible farming in our community. As more urban residents move into Kingston it will be important to maintain a healthy balance between farming and residential interests. It is important that our farmers feel they are recognized as having a vested “right to farm” provided they are being responsible land managers.

5) Farmers and residents appear to share a strong appreciation for the need to protect our environment, particularly our surface and ground water systems. The current Provincial stream buffer zones (Riparian Zones) are only 15 metres. In many areas of Kingston these setbacks are inadequate and need to be examined. Our farmers and other land owners expressed considerable interest in the protection of our streams and even to providing controlled public access to their lands. All-terrain vehicles are a major concern to farmers and others.

6) One unique (and very challenging) issue for the Community of Kingston is the Provincial Special Planning Area. This “buffer zone” divides the Community essentially in half. In the Special Planning Area (SPA) subdivisions

are limited to an absolute maximum of 5 lots off any property in existence on July 1994. In the area to the west of the SPA boundary there are no limits on the number of lots. This dichotomy appears unfair to many. There are also serious concerns about suburban style development in our rural community which could change our character and potentially lead to increased traffic and long term environmental problems. How can we establish one uniform subdivision standard for the Community and address the current inequities in the system?

7) Another issue which arose in several groups was the feeling, particularly from longer term residents, that the social fabric of the Community has been deteriorating. Neighbours increasingly feel like strangers, church attendance is declining and there is a growing feeling that people are losing their attachment to their neighbours and to their Community. Hopefully, the Official Plan process can help the Community to come together and restore some of this lost sense of “community”.

Conclusion

We need your input on these and many other issues. Everyone is encouraged to attend our first Public Forum and bring your friends and neighbours. Charting a course for our Community’s future together is an ideal way to get to know your neighbours, share some passionate debate and maybe even make some new friends - or get re-acquainted with old ones.

Hope to see you on June 25th.

Kingston Planning Committee