

April, 2008

## ***Public Meeting: Proposed Official Plan, Municipality of Malpeque Bay***

By Hal Mills

The Municipality of Malpeque Bay includes the communities of Indian River, Hamilton, Malpeque, Baltic, Spring Valley, Darnley, and Sea View. An initial Public Meeting regarding preparation of a proposed Official Plan for the Municipality was held April 17<sup>th</sup> in the Malpeque Community Centre, with about 20 participants. The proposed Official Plan project is scheduled for completion by the end of March, 2010, and will include a series of public meetings and consultations. This initial meeting was to inform residents about the project and to begin involving them in it.

The meeting was hosted by the Planning Board established by the Municipality (Members of the Planning Board are: Jeremy Stiles (Chair); Jimmy Carruthers; and Stephane Senechal). Opening remarks were provided by Dave Smith, Council Chair, who explained the background to the project and Council's desire to have more influence over future developments. Having an approved Official Plan will transfer a degree of control over future land use from the Province to the Municipality.

Residents expressed some concern that having an Official Plan administered by the Municipality will do nothing but add another layer of bureaucracy for people to deal with. This led to a spirited discussion of the pros and cons of having an Official Plan, and the need for planning to contribute to rural development and sustainable living communities. For example, what is going to happen at Cabot Park? Discussion concluded with widespread expressions of public support for proceeding with preparation of the proposed Official Plan.

Residents identified a number of important issues that will need to be worked on during the planning process, including:

- **Windmills.** Windmill development has been a hotly debated issue in the past, and discussion amongst residents showed that little has changed. Are windmills just an eyesore that we don't want, or are they our future of green energy? The planning process will need to encourage an enlightened debate of related issues, as well as considering other alternative energy sources such as solar. We have an opportunity to define which areas of the Municipality (if any) could be acceptable for windmills.
- **Agriculture.** Agriculture is the foundation that drives our communities and we need to keep it going. Existing agricultural problems need to be fixed. Excessive planning controls could limit the ability of farmers to sell or use land to survive, and make things even worse. An Official Plan will not be able to fix all the problems facing agriculture, but it should do what it can to support our farmers.
- **Access to the shore.** Public access to the shoreline is an ongoing concern. Points of public access need to be identified, and research may be required to document

what access points have been public in the past. Planning should try to maintain or enhance public access to the shore, as well as facilities and signage that may be required to support access.

- Subdivisions. We need good information on all the subdivisions that have been approved (especially in the coastal zone) and what the current status of development is.
- Building Permits. Similarly, we need good information on the status of building permits for all approved lots. Where will the resources for administering building permits come from, and will the building permit revenues be returned to the community? We need to be able to handle building permits ‘better’ without additional costs. Lack of a building code for the Municipality is a related problem.
- Demographics. An Official Plan should consider demographic trends (age, sex, education, income, employment, etc) from the past 25-30 years based on census data and local sources of information such as Fire Department records.
- Research. We need a lot of research at an early stage in this planning process, so that information is available at future meetings to enable an informed discussion on planning issues.

Future steps will involve distribution of a discussion paper on planning issues, followed by a second public meeting anticipated for early July. Following the meeting research work was initiated with the Provincial government on subdivisions and building permits, and a status report on that work will be provided at the July public meeting.