

August, 2008

Workshops and Third Public Meeting: Malpeque Bay Proposed Official Plan

By Hal Mills

On August 28th the Malpeque Bay Planning Board held afternoon workshops followed by an evening Public Meeting. The latter was the third Public Meeting in a consultation process for preparation of a proposed Official Plan for Malpeque Bay, a project which began in April 2008 and is scheduled for completion by March, 2010. The afternoon workshops were an opportunity for 15 interested people to roll up their sleeves and work with each other on matters of importance to them for an Official Plan. The evening Public Meeting was well attended, with a good cross-section of permanent and seasonal residents among about 45 participants. The following is a summary of what took place at the meeting:

1. Background, Goals, Status: Jeremy Stiles (Chair of the Planning Board) welcomed participants, presented the background to the project, and summarized goals. Council initiated the project to gain a measure of control over future development within the municipality. A funding application was submitted to the Canada-P.E.I. Capacity Building Fund Program and, following funding approval, Council appointed this Planning Board. Goals established by Planning Board are:
 - Keep public informed and involved throughout the project;
 - Develop vision & goals with the public;
 - Identify planning issues and work on options for issue resolution;
 - Prepare a draft plan for public review; and
 - Submit a proposed Official Plan to Council for their consideration.

Work began in April and previous public meetings were held April 17th and July 3rd. A discussion paper on planning issues was prepared and printed in the County Line Courier, along with reports on each public meeting. Digital files on land use and development permits have been obtained, and products produced using those files through a Geographic Information System (GIS) were demonstrated.

2. Workshop Reports: Group #1 reported the following planning priorities:
 - Tourism and agriculture are compatible. Land use by farmers supports tourism, and farmers should not have to bear the full cost of maintaining the working landscape.
 - Promote beach access (signage, parking, garbage removal), nature trails, recreational opportunities, and cottage industries such as bakeries, arts and crafts.
 - Encourage development of cottages and retirement homes while promoting heritage styles of construction.

Group #2 reported the following planning priorities:

- Sustainable agriculture.

- Owner control of development. The Official Plan must be fair to land owners. Equitable taxation on land taken out of production.
 - Public beach access points need to be identified and developed.
 - Identify suitable wind energy sites away from current development.
3. Discussion. A stimulating discussion followed regarding:
- Additional Bureaucracy. Concerns were expressed that having an Official Plan administered by Council would only add another level of bureaucracy. Others felt that it would shift some responsibilities from Charlottetown to Malpeque Bay without adding to bureaucracy.
 - Purpose. The reasons for having an Official Plan were questioned. It was explained that Council wishes to gain a measure of control over future development, on behalf of Malpeque Bay residents.
 - Seasonal Residents. There was a measure of implied criticism about participation of seasonal residents that was countered by comments about their substantial contributions to the economy of the community, and their valuable insight to current land use issues.
 - Individual Rights vs Collective Rights. If an Official Plan is based on collective rights of citizens for a 'common good', it will have an impact on individual rights. Many participants stressed the need to share this burden among citizens, or to find some way of compensating individuals whose rights may be impacted unfairly.
 - Princetown Point-Stanley Bridge Special Planning Area. There was sharp criticism of Special Planning Area regulations which the proposed Official Plan will have to respect. It was suggested that the Planning Board ask the Province to amend the regulations and allow the Municipality to take over responsibility for planning and development.
4. Next Steps: A report on this meeting will be published in the County Line Courier; the Planning Board will arrange a special meeting with the agricultural sector at a time convenient to them; and the Planning Board will then prepare a 'first draft' of a proposed Official Plan prior to the next round of public consultations which are scheduled for January/February 2009.