

July, 2008

***Second 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. The second Public Meeting regarding preparation of a proposed Official Plan for the Municipality was held July 3rd in the Spring Valley Community Centre. 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 second public meeting was to bring residents up to date on the status of the project, and continue to involve them in identifying and discussing important planning issues. 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. The staff planning consultant is Hal Mills). The following is a summary of what took place at the meeting:

1. **Welcome and Introductions:** Jeremy Stiles welcomed participants to the meeting, introduced members of the Planning Board, and thanked Samantha Murphy and John Chisholm (PEI Municipal Affairs) for coming to share their knowledge of official plans. He then gave a brief summary of how and why Municipal Council initiated preparation of a proposed Official Plan.
2. **Status Report on Progress To Date:** Jeremy and Stephane Senechal gave a brief status report summarizing the application for and approval of funds to prepare a proposed Official Plan. Council established a Planning Board, work began in April, and the initial public meeting was held April 17th. The focus has been on identifying and researching planning issues and obtaining related information. Two agreements have been signed with PEI departments to obtain and use Geographic Information System (GIS) digital data for use in mapping and spatial analysis. David Cody, supported by Art Pringle, have agreed to provide GIS services to the Planning Board.
3. **GIS Mapping Demonstration:** David Cody explained that digital files for GIS work had just recently been obtained. He then proceeded with a demonstration of GIS capabilities and example products for supporting preparation of an official plan. GIS has the ability to display natural and resource attributes of the municipality, and overlay data on things such as subdivisions, building permits, and socio-economic characteristics. Questions were asked about the availability of information on the actual number of lots subdivided, sold and developed in the past 5 years.

4. Planning Issues Presentation: Hal Mills noted that there are issues associated with the preparation and implementation of any plan, but the planning process provides a vehicle for identifying options for issue resolution. Residents and Council presently have little influence over land use decisions; the process of preparing an Official Plan will provide an opportunity to define a vision and goal(s) for them to work towards. There also are cost and liability issues that will be addressed in the next presentation. An 'Implementation Strategy' must be prepared before plan approval, providing a 'go-no go' decision point for residents and Council.

There seem to be two main focal points for planning issues within the Municipality of Malpeque Bay: sustainable agriculture and coastal zone development. The municipality is blessed with abundant prime agricultural land and agriculture is the mainstay of the economy which supports our communities. Yet the farming community is in the midst of an economic crisis and the Official Plan will need to address options for supporting sustainable agriculture. Issues associated with agricultural practices will be addressed with sensitivity to those needs.

The coastal zone of the municipality also is an important resource, with many related planning issues. There are 16 approved coastal subdivisions with over 25 lots (although many lots have not been developed) and more subdivision applications and recreation development applications can be anticipated. There are related aesthetic issues including the landscape and viewplanes which make the area attractive to residents and visitors. Access to the shore, destruction of coastal wetlands, and groundwater contamination are other coastal zone issues. A question was raised about the availability of information on the actual number of lots subdivided, sold and developed in the past 5 years. This type of information could be a good tool in the process of approving future development/subdivision projects as part of this plan.

5. Municipal Planning: Process and Implementation: Samantha Murphy's presentation gave details on the process for preparing, approving, and implementing an Official Plan, highlighting both the opportunities and challenges associated with the process. Official plans must meet the "Minimum Requirements for Official Plans" approved by Cabinet in 1997. They must respect provincial land use policy and adopt provincial lot size standards. Official plan bylaws can not be less stringent than required by provincial regulations. In this instance particular attention to regulations for the Princetown Point – Stanley Bridge Special Planning Area must be complied with.

There are many opportunities (potential benefits) associated with having an Official Plan. The planning process empowers residents and Council to define their vision and goals for the future. It allows Municipal Council to manage its land and resources, and become the decision-making authority for development. It balances the interests of individual property owners with wider interests and

objectives of the community. It identifies specific land and resource issues and defines actions necessary to address them. It prevents uncontrolled, haphazard development that may damage or detract from assets of the municipality, and opens doors to additional funding opportunities.

There also are challenges, and considerations related to these challenges need to be clearly understood. Approved official plans are binding on Council and property owners; there is a legal requirement for Council to implement the Official Plan and this comes with potential legal liabilities. It will be necessary for Council to have someone on staff or on contract who is able to competently deal with development applications. There are costs for the Municipality associated with preparation and implementation of an Official Plan. There is a requirement for periodic review of the plan to assess the possible need for plan amendment.

A question was asked about the current situation around Summerside where farmers wishing to sell land are limited in their ability to subdivide land. The issue is linked to the amalgamation of surrounding municipalities and legislation that controls municipal land use. Samantha Murphy confirmed that this type of limitation could be set as part of an official plan under jurisdiction of Council.

6. Next Steps: A discussion paper on planning issues and options is being prepared, and a summary will be published in the County Line Courier prior to the next public meeting. It is expected that the next public meeting will be held the evening of August 27th, preceded by an afternoon workshop where participants will be asked to roll up their sleeves and work on how issues should be addressed in the proposed Official Plan. Notices of the meeting and workshop will be published in the Journal Pioneer and the County Line Courier.

It was pointed out that, based on the fact that the municipality is mostly covered by farms, we need to get more participation from the farming community as they are the major stakeholders in the development of an official plan. Attempts also will be made to encourage more summer residents participation in the workshop and public meeting.

Note: The Planning Board is actively seeking input from residents, and will have a booth at the Kensington Community Harvest Festival.