

January, 2009

***Fourth Public Meeting: Proposed Official Plan,
Malpeque Bay Planning Board***

By Hal Mills

The Municipality of Malpeque Bay includes the communities of Indian River, Hamilton, Malpeque, Baltic, Spring Valley, Darnley, and Sea View. The fourth Public Meeting of the Planning Board regarding preparation of a proposed Official Plan was held January 20th in the Malpeque Community Hall.

The main purpose of the meeting was to focus on agricultural considerations. 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. Their 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 guest speakers John Sylvester and Phil Ferraro for attending.
2. Status Report on Progress to Date: Jeremy gave an overview of background including approval of funding for a two-year project to develop a proposed Official Plan, and appointment of a Planning Board by Council. He stressed that the plan will be the peoples plan, not the Planning Board's plan. Stephane summarized steps taken to date: work began in April 2008, with 3 public meetings and one workshop held throughout the balance of that year; these were held to get people involved in the project, to identify planning issues, and to get input on development and conservation objectives; articles have been printed in the County Line Courier, and David Cody has provided GIS mapping and analysis products. Jimmy acknowledged that previous meetings were not timely for the agricultural community. He mentioned concerns that the Planning Board already is aware of, and several external initiatives that they are participating in, with the goal of having an Official Plan that supports the agricultural community as much as possible.
3. Growing the Island Way. Hal presented information from "Growing the Island Way," the consultation draft Report of the Commission on the Future of Agriculture and Agri-Food on Prince Edward Island, and the consultation workshop held in Kensington. He noted that some recommendations in the draft report appear relevant to discussions between the agricultural sector and the Planning Board. The Commission's final report is due very soon, and we should pay close attention to its final recommendations, and the response of government and agricultural organizations to them.

4. The Agricultural Landscape. John Sylvester was introduced as a renowned PEI landscape photographer and a board member of the Lucy Maud Montgomery Trust. He commented on the 'narrowing landscape' of PEI where subdivisions and cottages have significantly narrowed previously attractive view-planes. Tourist exit surveys give the agricultural landscape as the # 1 attraction for tourists, followed by beaches. The combination of agricultural and coastal landscapes is important to the future of PEI tourism in general, and to this area in particular. This led to discussion from the floor on the importance of proper beach access to promote tourism, and beach access objectives for the Princetown Point – Stanley Bridge Special Planning Area.
5. ADAPT Observations. Phil Ferraro was introduced as Executive Director of the PEI ADAPT Council (which is governed by a Board of Directors from 14 PEI agricultural organizations. Phil spoke of ADAPT's interests in preserving agricultural land, and the possible use of trusts or other investment options in raising funds to compensate landowners. Non-resident land owners may be willing to financially support land preservation/acquisition. Mapping, and different layers of maps, can be used to better understand the importance of different areas and create planning scenarios. Bio-farming and GMO-free farming considerations were raised and discussed.
6. Open Discussion on Agricultural Considerations. The Planning Board was asked if the Official Plan would make it more difficult for farmers and landowners to get building permits. Not necessarily was the answer, that simply would be done through the Municipality instead of the Province, although we would have to follow provincial laws and regulations. Would the plan increase the need to hold community meetings every time someone wants to do something? Meetings would not be required for matters that are consistent with the Official Plan, they would be handled with standard administrative procedures. It would be up to Municipal Council to consider holding community meetings for major projects or applications that are not consistent with plan.
7. Next Steps: The Planning Board hopes to have its web-site online soon at www.malpequebay.ca. A report on this meeting will be printed in the County Line Courier, posted on the web-site, and emailed to everyone on our email list. It was suggested to hold another public meeting in the near future and to invite Samantha Murphy (Manager, Municipal Affairs) to attend and discuss the Special Planning Area as well as the mandate of Ralph Thompson (the recently appointed Commissioner On Land and Local Governance). Note: Samantha Murphy has declined our invitation. The Planning Board has scheduled the 5th Public Meeting for ?????