

## **SOUTHAMPTON RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION**

February 2006

After a very mild January, February has roared in and made up for lost time. We had over 36 inches of snow between the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 6<sup>th</sup>. It is a winter wonderland now and all the outdoor activities are in full gear. Wiarton Willie predicted an early spring and so Mother Nature taught him a lesson by wiping out the rest of Wiarton Willie's weekend with a blizzard! There has been some tree damage due to the initial wet snow and roofs are covered. Cottagers should be vigilant as the snow continues.

### **Property Assessments**

We sponsored a meeting on December 29 to hear the position and activities of the Canadian Advocates for Tax Awareness (CAFTA) and the new group CNTC. It was well attended and provided information on the aims of this group. There are questions on the manner that assessments are established and the fairness of the present system, given the escalating property values. Additionally, the downloading of costs from the Province is accentuating these problems. There doesn't seem to be an end of the downloading as the new bill on control of municipal workers pension fund highlights. Long term this could increase pension costs that have to be borne by the municipalities. The solution to these problems is complex and rests primarily with the Province. Norm Gurr is working closely with CAFTA and CNTA to petition the Government to reverse downloading of social and other services on cities municipalities and towns. All political parties are having meetings to discuss the issues but the wheels of change turn slowly. It should be a hot topic in the next provincial election. These organizations are also proposing that the market assessment system should be replaced.

The second part of the final tax bill calculation is the budget set by the Town, County and School Board. The proposed Town budget will likely be passed by Council in April. In the meantime, property owners who wish to query their assessments can do so up to December 31, 2006 by:

1. Completing a Request for Consideration form available online at [www.mpac.ca](http://www.mpac.ca)
2. Calling 1 800 296 6722 and request a form by mail
3. Write to MPAC Box 9808 , Toronto ON M1S 5T9

You can also file a Notice of Complaint with the Assessment Review Board before March 31, 2006 . Forms can be obtained by calling 1 800 263 3237. This date has now been extended by three months.

### **Wal-Mart Development**

Wal-Mart has announced plans to build a 120,000sq ft store on 17 acres in the south end of Port Elgin, east of Hwy 21 at the CAW Rd. The plans also call for possibly four stand alone stores on the same parcel, similar to the Owen Sound development. The plans for this store compare to about 48,000 sq ft for the Independent Store and about 90,000 sq ft for the Wal-Mart in Owen

Sound . This is huge! It is possible that this is a maximum size they are applying for and it may in reality be smaller. The advantage claimed by Wal-Mart supporters are the retention of money within the community that would otherwise be spent in Owen Sound and other areas as well as the attraction to Saugeen Shores of shoppers from Kincardine, Paisley etc. They expect that these additional day trippers will spend money in the rest of the Town. Reaction is mixed with some people liking the idea of a Wal-Mart in Town but many people have serious reservations about the impact on the whole area:

- Typically Wal-Mart draws business away from local core stores to the detriment of the existing small locally owned businesses. The Official Plan discussions showed many residences feel the local stores in Southampton and Port Elgin are an important part of the charm of our Town, stimulate tourism, attract summer residents and draw permanent people and businesses to the area.
- Wal-Mart has a poor reputation in labor relations and how they treat their staff.
- Local business owners play a key role in the fabric of the community, working on committees, raising money and supporting charities. Wal-Mart apparently supports national campaigns only.
- Traffic problems along HWY 21 will be made worse with more congestion and delays.
- Storm water run off into the lake will increase dramatically due to the large paved parking lot. Where will this go and will it affect the beach at Gobles Grove? What will the impact be on water quality?
- Who will pay for the infrastructure with road and intersection upgrades plus traffic lights?

Several groups are looking at options to oppose this development. The company has to submit studies on the environmental and traffic impact. We certainly hope and expect Council consults fully with local businesses and puts forward plans and programs to underpin our existing downtown areas. Off-street parking, street upgrades, lighting and emphasis on attractive signage are some examples. The application is being reviewed by the County and will then come back to the Town. A public meeting is tentatively planned for April but no date has been set. We would be a lot happier if the new major development was evaluated under the new Official Plan rather than to old plan which has many loopholes and doesn't address residents concerns on growth, community values and other attributes.

We feel an independent study should be carried out to determine where the Wal-Mart business will come from and assess the impact on local businesses. Not all Wal-Mart stores are successful and in many cases, the local business base can be destroyed

### **Council Happenings**

The budget process is nearing completion and should be presented to Council in early April. Councilors are aiming at a 3 to 4% maximum budget increase. With the growth in new businesses

and houses of 2.1%, we don't believe any budget increase should be accepted. If growth is necessary to provide tax revenue for the Town, then Council should have the means to maintain expenditures at last year's level. The County is struggling to get their increase below 5%. The same argument applies to the County. If this can't be done, then growth is causing taxes to go up, not down and hence the whole case for more and more development is unsustainable and should be stopped. Even if a zero increase is achieved, some people's taxes will go up and some will decrease, mainly in Port Elgin where assessments rose less than in Southampton.

The financial picture for the Town would be significantly better if Development Charges had been implemented last year. About 135 new homes were built in Saugeen Shores last year. At the recommended levy of \$2400 per home, these charges would have netted the Town \$324,000. This is equivalent to a tax increase in the municipal portion of our taxes of 5%. The Association believes the Council was wrong in voting this source of revenue down. It forms part of the revenue stream of all other communities. Remember to raise this issue come election time. The Council rejected this revenue source to pay for growth but have chosen to place the costs on the backs of existing taxpayers.

Enbridge Wind Power Inc. has taken over the wind mill project south of Port Elgin. They plan to install 121 wind turbines to generate 200MW of power. They have signed agreements with 100 landowners for right to 17,000 acres across 35,000 acres. They hope to have the wind turbines running by the end of 2006. The Official Plan has been further modified and a summary of changes are posted on the Town web site. The PAC Committee is attempting to add wording into the plan to cover many of the points we raised over the last year. We intend to review this in detail and respond to the Committee soon. They would like to finish their work by the end of March with a possible statutory meeting and Council approval in April or May.

There was a Boil Water Advisory in Port Elgin for two weeks in January when turbidity in the inlet water to the Treatment plant there could not be handled in the normal way. A similar problem has occurred in Kincardine. This is a turbidity problem and not a bacteria problem but is still potentially a health hazard. The new water inlet in Southampton will prevent this happening here in the future.

As mentioned in our last newsletter, the Residential Water Capital Contribution on your water bill will rise from \$6 per month to \$10 per month in May 2006 and then to \$14.50 in May, 2007. This increase is to cover the costs of borrowing money to pay for the water treatment plant upgrade. All other water users are seeing similar increases.

#### Waterfront and Beach

We have written to the Town to request action and/or information on a number of topics:

- Confirmation that repairs to the sidewalk from Chantry View to Jerry's Fry's will be completed in 2006.
- Fund a full time bylaw officer to control problems of bicycles and dogs on the sidewalk and dogs on the beach for peak times in August and September.
- Budget for funds to complete repairs and painting of the benches at the end of Morpeth St.

- Funding should be planned to restore the dunes to their previous condition. Trails, walkways and signage have fallen into disrepair.
- We are concerned that water testing along the beach area is not rigorous enough and potential problems may be inadvertently overlooked. Sediment sampling should be included as well as testing during rough weather. Specific testing at storm water outlets is also needed, especially with the massive Wal-Mart development ..
- We feel a review is needed on Beach Preservation and Beach and Water Pollution Prevention. The Association is retaining Geoff Peach from the Lake Huron Centre for Coastal Conservation to update the study he did several years ago relating to snow fencing and grading as well as the issues 4 to 7 above. We are asking the Town to fund this study and extend to Port Elgin if they desire. If they refuse, we will do the study on our own as we are all deeply concerned on these issues.

### **Southampton 150 th Anniversary**

The committee spearheading this celebration in 2008 is very active. Presentations have been made to all the local service clubs and community groups to enlist their support. The idea is to run a series of events throughout 2008 with a 150 th theme. It is hoped various clubs who already organize many activities and events will expand one or more of these regular functions with a 150 th Anniversary theme. The 150 th Committee would support and help publicize these events. The intent is to build on the wonderful role these organizations play in the community. A parade and banquet are also planned.

The Residents Association has donated \$500 as seed money to assist in the start up of this year of celebration and we will look at ways of raising more money in the summer with a golf tournament. A successful Heritage Dinner and fund raiser was held on February 18 th .

We hope you are all enjoying your winter, either here in the winter wonderland of Saugeen Shores or in your winter retreat.

Tim Andersen , February 18, 2006