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# The Highlander

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**INSIDE: HOME AND COTTAGE SHOW RETURNS PAGE 5**

**FREE**



Minden resident Patrick Walshe has long called for a review of local governments. *Photo by Lisa Gervais.*

## Is it time to discuss County governance?

### HIGHLANDER INVESTIGATES

By Lisa Gervais

When campaigning to be mayors and deputy mayors in 2018, Haliburton County candidates were asked about amalgamation.

In his opening remarks to a debate audience at Haliburton School of Art + Design, Minden Hills mayor Brent Devolin was the only candidate to address the issue.

“Our current municipal structure of 24 persons in 32 political positions in a County of less than 20,000 permanent residents [now 20,571] is not sustainable,” he said at the time. He added, “A four-year term of

council is enough to assess, consider, plan and execute the possible changes in time for a municipal election in 2022.”

During question period, voter Patrick Walshe pushed the issue, saying, “I really don’t want to hear you guys say we should talk about it or we might talk about it. I think amalgamation has to be looked at.”

More than three years after that debate, there has been no study into a governance review for Haliburton County and its four lower-tier municipalities. Instead, there has been a service delivery review, paid for by the province, “to understand, identify, and evaluate opportunities to achieve a more efficient and effective service delivery

model across the Haliburton municipalities while maintaining adequate service levels.”

Haliburton County CAO Mike Rutter said, “The focus of staff is really not on the governance question. Our focus has been on ensuring there is a process in place that will provide our councils with sufficient information to make decisions on the [service delivery review’s] recommendations.

Warden Liz Danielsen said they are already working to eliminate duplication and streamline the way things are done via the ongoing service delivery review - which is expected to take until 2023 to complete. She noted that every department

at every municipality is taking part in the discussions.

For example, the warden said they know contractors who work in all four townships are in some cases dealing with four different sets of rules. “Even if we can resolve something like that, we’ve made progress,” she said.

### Service delivery review first

She emphasized the service delivery review will have to play out before there is talk of a governance review.

Continued ‘Devolin’ on page 6



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Minden Hills Mayor Brent Devolin has been pro-amalgamation for years. *File.*

## Devolin: about efficiency and value for money

### HIGHLANDER INVESTIGATES

Danielsen added, “Just because there’s duplication doesn’t mean that we have to amalgamate to resolve the issue.” She said amalgamation might eventually be the answer but she’s not convinced of widespread council support.

“Obviously, all of this started with thoughts of amalgamation. It’s fine to say ‘we need to amalgamate and stamp our feet’ but that doesn’t mean we need to amalgamate. Is it the answer? Will it be cheaper? We’ve seen some examples where it’s not cheaper?”

Devolin said it isn’t necessarily about saving money. “This is about being more efficient and getting value for money.”

Danielsen said she’s personally come around to the point where “I am open.”

She said the service delivery review process “has opened my eyes. You find yourself thinking, maybe we should be doing this, that or the other. More councillors may be coming to that conclusion. Maybe amalgamation is inevitable.”

Devolin has never wavered. When he announced in the fall that he won’t be seeking a third term as mayor, he said one of his greatest regrets is that he was not able to push his colleagues to consolidate local government.

In a lengthy interview, he elaborated “I still think that 32 political positions for a population of less than 20,000 people [now 20,571] is absurd.”

He said COVID has caused an explosion of growth in the Highlands and highlighted labour shortages in municipal government.

He said it’s easier to attract candidates to larger governments. With a background in forestry and cars, he added those industries had to consolidate to survive and it’s no different for local government.

“I’m just a huge believer in a proactive stance rather than a reactive stance.”

That being said, the current provincial government has no plans to move forward with changes to regional governments, according to a spokesperson for the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Rather, “The province encourages municipalities to look for opportunities to work together and supports locally-developed solutions that are mutually beneficial,” Conrad Spezowka said.

As for Walshe, he thinks the service delivery review does not go far enough.

“If we’re doing a performance analysis and it is going to be made by cutting jobs, for example, and your job is going to be cut, how objective are you going to be? I’m not saying you’re dishonest or disloyal, but it is far from a thorough review of them managing funds, and providing the best level of government in this part of the world.”

He thinks there would be “a whole other level of service improvements, streamlining and a gazillion other benefits” that would come from amalgamation.

“This is 2022. We can’t be running things the way we were in 1982. It makes no sense. I don’t think there’s any real thirst for meaningfully improving the services government brings to this part of the world. We’re still stuck in the 1980s.”

*Next week: It isn’t about saving money*

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# Highlander news

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Top: Organizer Scott Danilko speaks to the convoy in Minden Feb. 5. Bottom: Trucks lead the convoy in Minden Feb. 5. Photos by Lisa Gervais.

## County convoy about 'hope'

By Lisa Gervais

The leader of a Haliburton County convoy said his decision to start an online group that attracted 125 vehicles to a rally Feb. 5 was more about hope than science.

Scott Danilko and his wife Penny went to Ottawa Jan. 29 to see for themselves what was going on with the convoy there. They took their children, aged nine and 11, and a four-year-old grandchild, and Danilko said "I felt as safe as anywhere."

Walking through the crowd gathered around Parliament Hill, he added, "it gave me reassurance that there's hope. It was exhilarating."

That prompted him to start a local Facebook page to see if anyone was interested in a convoy from Minden to Haliburton.

It attracted more than 125 vehicles and they are planning to do it again this Saturday, Feb. 12.

"To show support for the convoys in Ottawa and Toronto and other cities around Canada," Danilko said of his motivation in an interview.

Asked about his beliefs, he added, "I believe everybody should have freedom of choice and not be mandated to be vaccinated."

It was pointed out that people can choose whether or not to be vaccinated but that choice comes with consequences such as vaccine passports.

"I'm against that," he responded.

He was then asked about agencies such as Health Canada and the Centre for Disease Control in the U.S. saying vaccines, masks and other COVID-19 regulations are working.

He said it was "bull crap ... because the numbers went higher this winter than they were even at the start of the pandemic. We were into the thousands and thousands and people were vaccinated and wearing masks."

The Highlander asked what science he had to the contrary of Health Canada and the CDC. He did not have any.

He then went on to say he did not support children having to be masked, saying he did not have to wear a mask when he was

in school. He added it is counterproductive since they remove their masks to eat their lunches. He doesn't agree with children having to be vaccinated against COVID-19 either. When Danilko was in school there was not a pandemic. Asked whether his children were vaccinated against other childhood illnesses, such as chicken pox, he said they were. However, Penny noted it was one vaccine, not two and a booster with the possibility of more to come.

Danilko said while he did not have scientific facts, he simply was able to get a group going online, a group that could probably be labelled "a fringe minority," he conceded.

"It makes some people feel good about everything that has gone on in the last two years. It's been all doom and gloom. It gives them some hope. It brings a small fringe of people a little bit of happiness. I feel good about it. And it is to support the ones in Ottawa and at Queen's Park, to just let them know they are not the only ones being a part of this."



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# Highlander news



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## 'Devastating' call inspired better policing

By Lisa Gervais

The phone call that would change Paul McDonald's life came in the middle of the night.

When he was 18, the partner of his 22-year-old sister had tried to strangle her to death with a telephone cord, all because she had told him she was pregnant with his baby.

McDonald jumped in his car and drove the hour to his sister.

"That's a devastating call to get at two o'clock in the morning," McDonald says, his eyes welling up with tears.

It was bad enough his sister had been beaten. On top of that, he said the police who responded to the call did not demonstrate how he thought policing should be done.

He chooses his words carefully, since he is a 15-year member of the OPP.

"A negative interaction with an element of policing that is not how I want to see policing done," he said during an interview at the Minden OPP detachment.

"From the get go, the officers that showed up asked her 'why are you calling? What happened?' The perception we got as a family, myself, my oldest sister, and my father, the whole time during that interaction at the hospital and police station with male officers and a female victim was that they were making my sister feel like it was her fault. Revictimizing the victim right at the onset of the call and not looking like they actually cared."

It was a defining moment for the fourth-generation police officer.

"I always knew I wanted to be a police officer. From an early age I just knew and after this incident with my middle sister, I knew I was going to try and do better than the people that came before me."

McDonald, who works out of the Haliburton Highlands OPP detachment, has been nominated in the 7th annual Police Services Hero of the Year awards program.

Nominations came from a victim of a sexual assault who can't be named as her matter is still before the courts; McDonald's wife, Krystal McDonald-Smith, the father of a hockey player McDonald coached, John Salfi, and the family of a deceased



Sergeant Paul McDonald through the mirror of his police cruiser. Photo by Lisa Gervais.

accident victim.

"Because of you, I am able to fall asleep at night feeling a sense of security," the sexual assault victim wrote.

Salfi refers to McDonald as an "amazing community role model" in his nomination.

Ben Middleton shares the story of his young brother's death in a July 2015 car accident and McDonald going "above and beyond" with the family that night. "To officer Paul McDonald, as I write this with tears in my eyes and a very heavy heart, I need you to know that you made an incredibly horrifying situation better," he wrote.

McDonald-Smith talks about her husband's mental health struggles after many on-the-job tragedies. It led him to eventually become the mental health liaison officer for the mobile crisis intervention team out of Peterborough County. He was promoted in September 2021 as a sergeant out of Haliburton.

### Did nothing for years

However, McDonald admits he did not take care of his physical or mental health for

years.

He added like most police officers, he hid behind a badge of bravado, not sharing his struggles with his family.

"I became extremely distant and callous, withdrew and bottled everything up inside to protect them, it made me a worse person until my wife made me see the person I had become."

The sexual assault case involving the unnamed woman triggered him.

"You don't sign up to do this job to see death and decay and destruction. It takes its toll on you."

He knew he needed help and went to counselling, which led to him becoming the mental health officer in Peterborough.

"I thought, if I can go and get counselling for myself and talk to people, then why can't I do that for other police officers and the general public?"

He got healthier and it saved his marriage.

"Mental health is not talked about. Everybody hides it. Everybody has skeletons in their closet that they're too embarrassed to show. But we go to the dentist for a broken tooth, we go to a doctor for a broken arm, why aren't we going to

the medical profession and counsellors for a broken mind?"

The new mental health liaison officer now also comes to the Haliburton detachment.

Through it all, McDonald said he has never forgotten how his sister was treated that night. He added he believes he has been gifted with emotional intelligence. He tries to bring that to every aspect of his life and certainly his policing.

He always asks himself, "If this happened to my wife, my sister, my father, how would I want the officer to be interacting with me right now?"

As for the awards nomination, he said he doesn't do his job for recognition. He doesn't care if he wins but the nominations have touched him deeply, especially his wife's. "To say that I'm her hero really takes its toll. If it wasn't for her telling me that I needed to wake up, I wouldn't have progressed to where I am right now."

"I just want to help the most people I possibly can before I'm not able to do it anymore."

The Police Association of Ontario award winners will be formally announced during the PAO's annual general meeting in June.

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