

The Highlander

To whom it may concern:

Online Special Initiative

What are we doing? Local Elections Podcast

Published by The Highlander, Haliburton

We have known for some time that we wanted to do something special for the local elections. For the past few years, our local councils have produced some of our best stories – several contentious issues have come before them, which have generated a lot of reader interest. In our community, political leadership matters.

We have also for some time wanted to do a podcast to expand our reach into a new medium. Local resident and multi-media producer Justin van Lieshout approached us in the early summer with the idea of creating a podcast that explored the main issues of the local elections. He said that we would reach a younger demographic, with the aim of engaging them in the political process.

We produced two types of shows. The first was one that explored the main local issues in the election, with an episode dedicated to each. We interviewed some of the major players and then commented on what we found. It was interesting playing with this format, allowing the reporters to provide comments around the reporting, as is common in other well-received podcasts. We used this material to print opinion pieces in the paper on each of the issues. The second type was complete, un-edited interviews with candidates. From these interviews, we published summaries in the printed paper, giving a full page to each candidate.

The community received our work very well. We have frequently received comments about the excellence of our coverage. We've heard of readers who have changed their minds over who to vote for based on listening to the audio of our candidate interviews.

We are enormously proud of our work on this project and hope to continue producing podcasts in the future.

Please note that due to the election being held on October 24, this project went beyond the end date of this year's contest. I am entering only episodes that were published before September 30, 2022.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Simon Payn
Publisher
The Highlander

McKelvey has 40 years of municipal experience

By Lisa Gervais

Qualifications

Tammy McKelvey started in municipal government in 1980 as a receptionist for Anson, Hindon and Minden. She worked her way up to payroll clerk, accounts payable, deputy clerk, treasurer. She was clerk, treasurer, tax collector at one point. She was the first CAO-clerk for Minden Hills. She was the CAO of Dysart et al. She ended her career as treasurer for Algonquin Highlands in 2019.

Amalgamation

“I am a proponent. However, the service delivery review is rolling out. I want to see it rolling faster. My first priority would be building and planning departments. It’s ridiculous that a County the size of Haliburton has five official plans, four zoning bylaws ... it’s just so inefficient.” Asked how it could be sped up, she said, “I think we need to focus the priorities on it...start putting the staff resources where they need to be to make it a better place, make it more efficient and effective.”

Health

“We need to collectively lobby for additional funding. The paramedic service, where they started doing the home check-ins, is wonderful. There’s going to be more need for that sort of thing. We can’t have ambulances going to Lindsay for CAT scans and staying for a whole day because they were sent out on another call there. So, the long-term benefits of providing a CAT scan to our local hospital really will provide us with some financial gains at the other end, but it’s a big expense. It will also help attract doctors. They want that sort of diagnostic equipment. It will be a terrible decision to have to make if one of the hospitals has to close... Having said that, I can see where the cost of running two hospitals is not sustainable.”

Housing

She’d like amendments to the zoning bylaw to allow for secondary houses on larger pieces of property. In town, she’d like to see infilling some of the larger lots that are serviced with sewers and water. “I’d like to see opportunities for people to sever those ... Change the mindset of what we can do to provide affordable lots for people to build on ... Tiny houses is definitely another issue we need to look at.”

Poverty

“I would encourage employers to provide a living wage to their workers, starting with the township. The lack of student hiring for the township is a poor image in our communities with the lack of garbage collection and grass maintenance. These young people can’t afford to work for minimum wage and I feel the township



Tammy McKelvey is vying to be councillor-at-large in Minden Hills. Photo by Lisa Gervais.

needs to be a leader. Paying wages over minimum wage usually results in a wage subsidy from the province as well. We need to encourage the development of community gardens and provide space on municipal property. Lack of housing, and affordable daycare, is adding to the poverty levels.

Shoreline preservation bylaw

“The entire economic engine of our area is the lakes. If we don’t protect those, we will have nothing here. I am a strong proponent for lake protection. I think the shoreline preservation bylaw needs to roll out. Let’s try it. Let’s see how this is and commit to reviewing it so it is a living document that can be changed if things need to be tweaked, but let’s try it out first before there’s any decision to change.” She also thinks the septic reinspection program has to continue and properties requiring remediation followed up on.

Short-term rentals

“Short-term rentals have to be regulated. It’s no longer just people renting out their cottages for a couple of weeks to help subsidize the cost of having it. It’s becoming a business. It’s taking away the enjoyment of the lakeside lifestyle. The County’s initiated that process. I think we should probably not re-invent the wheel. Lake of Bays is a good place to start. They have a process in place and we could probably utilize that and put it to work in Haliburton County.”

Transportation

“Public transportation in an area so spread out with a limited population – I don’t see it being in the foreseeable future. You can run a bus from Minden to Haliburton, great, how many people are off all of the other hundreds of roads that can’t utilize it? It’s a critical infrastructure that’s needed. Can it be feasible? I question whether we can. The County has tried pilot projects and tried to come up with a solution.”

Vision for the future

“We really need to work on the government structure and make sure it’s running efficiently and effectively. The decision-making has to set priorities that are going to benefit the majority of the ratepayers. We will never be able to do everything for everyone. We need to make sure people can safely drive down our roads. Long-term, I’d love to see lots of things for kids. I’d love to see a waterpark. I’d like to see a downtown so when people come from the other areas with their kids to the waterpark they’re going to spend some money in town. I don’t like to see how people have to drive to Bobcaygeon to go to a waterpark. Swimming pool... we missed the boat. We are “arena poor” and now we have to make sure it becomes useable and bring events to it.”

Minden Hills

“Minden Hills has a lot to offer. The village has water and sewer, which makes

for tremendous development opportunities and housing. I think priorities need to be set for our limited financial resources. One per cent on the levy is \$97,000 so we need to look at it from that perspective. Roads are going to be my number one priority and housing is so important. It’s affecting everybody here.” As for debenturing for roads, McKelvey said the long-term costs must be offset by the benefits. She does not agree with borrowing money for operational costs. Asked what could be done to expand the tax base, she said they have to help existing businesses, ensure basic garbage collection and grass-cutting downtown so it’s attractive. She said it would be hard to attract industry, so it will have to be residential growth. She wants more diversion at the landfill: hard plastics’ recycling, periodic shredding of confidential documents, and a Beer Store bottle return run by service clubs.”

Tammy McKelvey the candidate

“Municipal government has been my passion for most of my life. I have almost 40 years’ experience and think I can bring a lot to the table. I will hit the ground running.” She said she has the experience to ask the right questions and understands the legislation. “I don’t have that learning curve ... I think my background, experience and financial strength can really help. I think my team player skills and bringing the council together and making sure there is really good dialogue at the council table and encouraging that discussion” will help.

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Respect on the water

Some folks on Lake Kash reached out recently, concerned about wakes from commercial watercraft, particularly those involving wakeboarding and wakesurfing.

They said it was great the County had passed a shoreline preservation bylaw, however the focus was on land-based activities and had nothing to do with environmental impacts stemming from the water.

In short, they said the boats are driving fast, blaring music, and sending "tsunami" wakes ashore. They claim it's eroding the shoreline, stirring up goose poop sediment, and damaging fish and other waterfowl and their habitats. They say boulders are being washed up, sand and soil eroded, and trees leaning into the lake as their root systems are being swept away.

There is also wear and tear on docks. They also say they have to time their lake enjoyment around commercial hours.

I went on a little jurisdictional fishing expedition. Dysart et al? Nope, not their responsibility. The County? Sorry, not theirs, either. Various provincial ministries? Can't help you there. Transport Canada? Pay dirt. And while they regulate boat speeds within 30 metres of shorelines, they do not regulate wakes. Dead end.

With no apparent hard and fast rules in

place, it all comes down to respect.

In chatting with Craig Bowker, who owns Ski-Mazing Watersports School, he said he gets about one complaint every two years. However, he said his operation does very little wakeboarding or wake surfing. They mostly just teach kids to waterski and wakeboard. He said he follows the rules the industry has put in place and has been able to live amicably enough with people on the lake the past 20 years or so.

Haliburton Hockey Haven started a new wakeboarding program this year but we've been unable to connect with owner Troy Binnie to get his take on what's been happening.

Living in a County of more than 600 lakes means we all have to get along.

I personally like non-motorized watercraft. I prefer a kayak and canoe. However, I respect that some of my neighbours like to take a tinnie out fishing, while others prefer pontoon boats. Others still like boats with a bit more grunt, or water skiing, wakeboarding or wake surfing. For others, a jet ski is their choice of ride.

For the most part, I find other boaters are respectful when they see my little blue kayak bobbing in the water. They generally slow down, or at least give me time to steer my ride so I face the wake and have a better

chance of not being capsized. I can be a bit judgmental when I see wakes affecting the loons, geese and ducks around me.

As Bowker says, no one has a right to monopolize a shared water space. There is nothing stopping a lake association, for example, from reaching out to its commercial and non-commercial operators to try to establish sound ground rules so everybody gets a chance to enjoy our waterways.

Tips and suggestions aren't hard to find. The Federation of Ontario Cottagers' Associations (FOCA) has been raising awareness about the issue for a couple of years. Along with the Muskoka Lakes Association, and Safe Quiet Lakes, they collaborated on a short video about being #WakeAware.

With more and more people coming to the County and building on lakes, rivers and streams, we have to ensure mutual respect going forward. And it isn't just for humans. We need to protect our aqualife and wildlife, and overall environment.



By Lisa Gervais

What are we doing about health care?

By Lisa Gervais

A lot of people think municipal governments have nothing to do with health care in Ontario.

While it's true the province oversees much of the jurisdiction, the County and its townships actually have quite a role to play in the field.

For example, the County of Haliburton runs the paramedic service locally. They respond to calls in the County and parts of surrounding counties. They employ about 50 primary care paramedics. They operate seven front-line ambulances. They have three bases: in Haliburton, Minden and Tory Hill. They respond to about 4,000 calls per year. Naturally, the province shares in the funding for all of this.

On top of that, the County transitioned from having a recruitment committee to hiring a part-time physician recruitment coordinator in 2019. Wendy Welch has been beating the bushes for doctors ever since. To this end, the County provides financial incentives for a return of service for between four and six years. It works out to about \$25,000 per year, up to \$150,000.

In 2020, the County expanded this to include emergency room doctors, who commit to full-time practice.

Late last year (2021), the County also leased a property to house visiting physicians on a short-term basis with partial cost recovery.

You might have seen the three new billboards around the Highlands, too? The ones with the canoes parked up on a beach and 'staff parking' to entice new physicians.

In fact, the County spends about \$210,000 a year on trying to get doctors.

They've recruited six in six years.

But, is it all enough? Could a new, incoming County council do more?

The answer is yes.

For example, they could make the recruitment position full-time and provide more staff housing for health care professionals.

Former head of EMS, and current County Coun. Pat Kennedy has some ideas. So does his wife, Cheryl Kennedy, who has been involved in physician recruitment in the past.

Pat is glad there is now 24/7 paramedic staffing in Tory Hill to better service the eastern part of the county but worries about the northwest. He'd like another 24/7 base and suggests the former Frost Centre in Algonquin Highlands. If there was the political will, the County would have to talk to the Ontario Public Service Employees' Union, which now owns the site. It would also have to pony up more money.

Kennedy's also worried that County ambulances are spending a lot of time taking patients to Lindsay and Peterborough for CAT scans. While on the way to and from those hospitals, they are having to respond to 911 calls in other jurisdictions because they are the nearest ambulances. That leaves the County short of ambulances at times.

He suggests, and Cheryl agrees, that the only real solution is for the County to lobby the province to get a CAT scan for the Highlands. It's not a stretch since CAO Mike Rutter has also expressed that he would like to see the Highlands have a CAT scan. This would require not just lobbying but some money and possibly kick starting a community fundraising drive.

The other prickly issue – and no doubt an elephant in the room – is a made-in-Haliburton solution to the fact we have two hospitals in the County and probably should only have one if serious about housing a CAT scan and attracting health care professionals.

It would be interesting to know – if asked point blank – what candidates would say about where one hospital should be located – Haliburton or Minden – and what should be done with the other building?



WHAT ARE WE DOING?

A NEW PODCAST FROM THE HIGHLANDER. OUR EDITORIAL TEAM UNPACKS ISSUES DEFINING THE HIGHLANDS' FUTURE AHEAD OF THE FALL ELECTIONS.

LISTEN ONLINE: THEHIGHLANDER.CA/PODCAST. OR WHEREVER YOU GET YOUR PODCASTS.

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Walk the walk on housing



By Lisa Gervais

Can we all agree that housing – or lack thereof – is the most pressing issue in Haliburton County at the moment?

And, is there consensus that it's time to stop talking about it, but rather finding solutions?

The Haliburton Highlands Chamber of Commerce issued a call to action to all levels of government late last week.

There's nothing new here, folks. However, the business community had hoped this summer would offer a return to normal. They banked on making good money to help recover from COVID-19. They didn't plan to have the staffing shortages that forced them to work double-time, and in some cases, cut back days and hours of operation. Traditionally, they make enough money in the summer to pay off those lines of credit they needed to dip into in the late fall, winter and early spring. They don't have that luxury now. As they stare down the seasonal change, they are facing some unprecedented financial stress, which is causing a very real mental health crisis. The fall-out could affect this community for decades.

It's a complex topic but there are recurring themes. The federal and provincial governments could always do more. We hear all kinds of housing announcements. MPP Laurie Scott is always happy to tick off the amounts of money pledged for housing.

However, we have yet to see that translate into shovels into ground in Haliburton County.

And MP Jamie Schmale is always quick to point out the shortcomings of the federal Liberals on this portfolio, but he hasn't managed to get shovels in the ground either.

Our municipal politicians are ringing their hands. However, they are at the helm of the very places where change is desperately needed. Our current system of a County and four lower-tier governments is not helping. Five sets of different official plans and zoning bylaws, for example, provide hurdles, not solutions.

Candidates are talking about the need for tiny homes, for example, but are short on mentioning that no township would allow them under current rules and regulations.

So, the County and its townships have to figure out the barriers and eliminate them. That is not going to happen overnight. At the same time, they have to look at shorter-term solutions for that "crisis response" the chamber is clamouring for.

A few years ago, there was a housing forum in the County. It is time for a second one. All players must come back to the table. There have to be hard questions asked, and difficult topics raised. For example, what needs to be changed locally to allow for trailers to

house workers? What has to be altered for smaller homes to be allowed. How can we pave the way so there can be more than one dwelling on a residential lot?

Let's take it one step further. Where could we find land within serviced areas of townships such as Dysart et al and Minden Hills to build? In an area blessed with so much greenspace, could a portion of Head Lake Park be used for housing? In a changing world, where agriculture is not the local industry it once was, is it time to ask whether part of the Minden fairgrounds, for example, could be converted to housing space?

As residents of this County, we also have to ask ourselves some difficult questions. Do we live on hundred-acre farms near town that we are no longer farming? Are we planning to sell for millions upon millions of dollars or could we take a fair market price for the sake of our community? Are we living alone in a large house on a large parcel of land and refusing to sell even though it could be to the betterment of our community?

Clearly, it's time for all of us to walk the walk, and no longer talk the talk.

What are we doing about shorelines?

According to the 2021 Census, Haliburton's population has grown nearly 14 per cent since 2016.

Many lakefront property owners have noticed the bump: our County's lakes are growing busier and busier and property values and building activity have skyrocketed since the early 2000s.

A lake assessment, completed in partnership with the Coalition of Haliburton Property Owners Associations, showed only 46-47 per cent of shorelines surveyed in Haliburton County are still natural. Experts say 75 per cent should be "naturalized" to help a lake stay clean.

In 2020 the County of Haliburton first circulated a draft shoreline preservation bylaw. Nearly immediately, landscapers, construction companies and many residents took issue with the way the matter was being handled, or whether the public had enough time to weigh in.

Over the next few months, Council heard waves of criticism over the draft bylaw, specifically its lengthy application process and restriction of development within 30 metres of the water.

In January 2021, they decided to get help. They hired Hutchinson Environmental and J.L Richards to lead a review of the bylaw, get the public's opinion and draft a new one. The consultants began work that spring.

More than 18 months later, in August of this year, council passed a new shoreline preservation bylaw.

This paper has written more than a dozen

articles on the bylaw, the reasons behind it, and the criticism it stirred up, but here are the basics: the province of Ontario recommends limiting development near water bodies within the Precambrian Shield (which includes Haliburton County). Multiple environmental scientists I and my colleagues spoke with echoed a need for stronger protections against overdevelopment on Highlands' lakes, to preserve wildlife habitat and prevent pollutants from entering our waterbodies.

However, many Highlanders said they felt they weren't listened to during the consultation period before the bylaw was passed.

A petition signed by more than 200 landowners claimed that J.L Richards' method of interviewing lake associations may give the wrong impression of landowner sentiments, especially when some lake associations don't count all lake residents as members. Nearly all lake associations are members of the CHA, which publicly supported the creation of a shoreline preservation bylaw. Others claimed the bylaw might halt the development of new builds while not addressing the many lake-front lots that are mowed or developed in contradiction to the bylaw.

Still, more claimed that septic systems aren't taken into account. Faulty septic systems can lead to pollutants leaching into soil and, eventually, water bodies.

However, many seem to be misinformed about key aspects of the final document and

current events.

For instance, routine tree maintenance and trimming is allowed, and several stipulations about tree cutting were already enshrined in the County's 2018 tree preservation bylaw, which this new document adds too. You can still build a sizeable path to the waterfront.

As well, municipalities have already completed hundreds of septic inspections, most completed by contracted student staff, this summer alone.

Before the final council vote, Dysart et al mayor Andrea Roberts mentioned a new council could vote to overturn the bylaw. She's right. Councillors can change the bylaw too, which has been described by many as a "living document".

Some candidates in this year's election have campaigned on promises to change or overhaul the bylaw.

The shoreline preservation bylaw is the most significant and controversial decision this County council has made. But the bylaw will affect homeowners from Gooderham to Dorset, with municipal councillors playing a role in handling complaints or criticism too. We're asking each candidate how they feel about the final document. We hope they've read it.



By Sam Gillett

Take a deep dive into election issues: thehighlander.ca/podcast