

Northeast Avalon Times June 2014

Town councils must honor societal contracts

Birds I View



Bill Monteverchi

If they blow a hole in the backbone
The one that runs across the muscles of the land
We might get a load of stone for the road
But I don't know how much longer we can stand

Sarah Harmer
Escarpment Blues

Some say Pontius Pilot was an honest man. Others and perhaps even he wished they could have helped or done otherwise. Town councils are often in the same predicament.

For decades, we have been discussing how sensible development must proceed and how we'll do better in the future. Yet community and individual self-determination take place in the present, and if we don't act forthrightly we are victims of our own designs. We will be left with the limited options of complaining and documenting past mistakes in the future. Clearly the future is now.

These concerns exploded close to home when at 2 pm on 2 June a dynamite blast in the Round Pond development in Portugal Cove – St. Philips rocked the landscape. The earth trembled, the house shook, the animals were terrified and the remaining fragments of forest that hadn't been clearcut went silent.

I had previously made multiple formal requests to the Portugal Cove – St. Philips Council to impose a 48-hour stop-work order to provide an interlude for open discussion of destructive ongoing developments. The council failed to act. This isn't too surprising though as they didn't even bother to inform residents about the dynamiting in their neighborhood. Our grim options were either to learn of the detonations from the developer or wait for the explosions.

This is no longer the idyllic community where we have lived most of our lives and raised our children. For months we have endured incessant dawn to dusk clear-cutting, the unsettling mind-wrenching pounding of rock drills and the screeching scrapping of bulldozers over rocky substrates. Yet this is all ok because an off-island developer has a permit to wreak havoc in our community.

What is happening?

What is going on in the Round Pond project is NOT development – it's environmental destruction. It's an environmental assault perpetrated to flatten a natural landscape that poses a inconvenience for a flat-minded developer who doesn't live with the chaos his destruction is generating for residents.

What can we do?

What I hear from Council is - "nothing". We are restricted in acting because the permits are in place. If we imposed a 48-hour stop-work order, the town would likely be sued because the developer is doing nothing illegal, we would likely lose in court and it will cost the town money.

Where to begin. Town councilors like all elected officials are entrusted with the well-being of the citizens they work for. Their primary responsibility is to guard the quality and integrity of community life and the environment. Town councils like elected provincial and federal bodies are societal care-takers. This is their most basic covenant. It supersedes privileges, permits and agreement that are provided to developers. And to not act accordingly breaks the fundamental contract for which they are responsible.

Yet only the threats of the developer seem to be weighed in their equation. What about the broken societal contract? Are we truly powerless in these appalling circumstances as the council tries to assume on our behalf?

Even if the council does not have the muster to stand on this account, why are they intimidated to call a 48-hour break in the detonations and havoc for a open unimpeded discussion about destructive development in our community? Are they fearful that a 2-day stoppage for a developer will bring the town to its knees?

The common sense thing to do would be to rescind permits for unnecessarily dynamiting the natural landscape. Why was such a permit even allowed in the first instance?

Developers must not always be given priority over residents. It's time for councils to embrace and uphold the most basic contracts they hold and to accept that their primary contractual obligations are not with developers but rather the residents of their communities.

A simple principle can guide us – accommodate rather than attack the natural landscape and environment. We do not have to accept living in a Developer's Paradise (Lost).

Other birds in the area and around the province

On 8 May, 48 great cormorants visited the ice enclosed Carmanville Harbour. Local residents had not previously seen cormorants in the harbour (John Tulk , Sam Winsor). Three black-headed gulls were seen nearby at the Gander River causeway.

An adult gannet with a broken wing was picked up in the Indian Bay River and well-cared for by Spencer Cutler, until the bird succumbed.

Dave Sheppard passed on an observation from fisherman Joe O'Leary of Portugal Cove South. Off Cape Race, Joe observed a huge iceberg that was blanketed with an estimated 20,000 to 30,000 turrs. In his 70 years on the water, Joe had never seen anything like it. Dave Sheppard is watching for a huge thick-billed murre migration this like the one in mid-June 2008, another year with considerable ice.

A male ring-necked pheasant (or pheasants) is making a showing around CBS. The latest sighting was documented in Spaniard's Bay with stunning photos by Ray Barrett [April Hedd].

My first osprey in the area was on 27 May at Murray's Pond. Though I had seen one weeks earlier near Bellevue, sightings are still rare, likely owing to cold spring conditions.

During late May short-eared owls were seen in Deadman's Bay and Musgrave Harbour [Carolyn Mayo]. A grounded great horned owl photographed on 2 June in Sunnyside did not look well (Wayne Ledwell).

The cold has also held flying insects at bay, yet some tree swallows are making a go of it. On 13 May, tree swallows arrived at Rushmere Farm on the Argentia Access Road [Dick Whitaker] and in late May we had a pair investigating our bird house in Musgrave Harbour.

Marlene Creates watched purple finches feeding on pussy willows in her forest garden in Portugal Cove. The song sparrow singing boisterously on a cold "Eddie Coffey gray foggy day" in Musgrave Harbour delivered the message that he wasn't necessarily singing because he was content as much as he had to.

Keep listening.

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