

Northeast Avalon Times October 2017

**The environment, development and municipal elections
Birds I View
Bill Montevecchi**



Sanderlings are among the last shorebirds to migrate from Newfoundland
[photo Bill Montevecchi]

It must be a devious, derisive or dirty word. Not one of the many candidates in the recent municipal elections on the northeast Avalon mentioned it in the campaign, signs, brochures, proposals etc. that I saw. Yet everyone looks forward in focused anticipation to the benefits of development – the ringer word for success and happiness in our communities. I base this perspective on my recent experiences in the Portugal Cove – St. Philips election, though I am well aware of the generality of this perspective.

In his September column in NEAT, Dick Whitaker appealed to the electorate to consider the environment. Yet in view all campaigning available to me it was virtually impossible to make any selection on the basis of environmental offerings by any of the candidates' proclamations. Indeed concerns about the environment were invisible.

But just look carefully where such inordinate focus on development for development's sake without trade-off for the environmental buffering ends up. Such successes can be seen in the congestion of Paradise where people are pleading for green space and trees. The unbroken

strip mall populated with fast-food take-outs is a stellar example of successful development that garnishes CBS. Or is it?

Are these municipal models that we hold dear for our communities on the northeast Avalon or can we do better? Many of us agree that we have to do better to value and preserve the rural nature of our communities, and not simply pay it lip service though there wasn't even much of that in recent election. We enjoy and prosper in the quality of life we have. But do we just take it for granted?

There are encouraging sign of young entrepreneurs opening creative small business moving and returning communities, for instance on the Bonavista Peninsula. They value the richness of the environment and the lifestyle, and they are fueling some added momentum for the survival and recasting of rural coastal communities. We are fortunate to see some of that enthusiasm on the northeast Avalon. If we play it right, more will follow. This is what we need to encourage

On the development side of the ledger, there are developers who push and push for high-density housing units in wetlands that would wreak community havoc in terms of flooding, water quality, etc. Some fence across ancient community right-of-ways to local ponds and post no trespassing signs - with no effective response from town councils. There's the proposed Maggie's Disgrace that would place a large heavy equipment depot uphill and in proximity to Windsor Lake - a major water supply on the northeast Avalon. This development would eradicate large tracts of forest from Windsor Lake to Round Pond and Beachy Cove Pond that are already challenged from illegal clear-cutting to the very edge of the ponds.

Wonderful housing lots can be nestled adjacent to and with access to waterways without removing every stick of vegetation. A treed lot adjacent to a pond or stream helps to ensure the health of the nearby pond, stream or river. Think more fish, waterfowl, loons – all enhancements that make your life richer in unexpected and often priceless ways.

Cutting to the water's edge is standard operating procedure for developers. This is because the provincial government has failed to uphold its own legislation. What might we expect now that the provincial government has continued with their Pontius Pilot approach and handed responsibility for crown lands to municipal governments? We need some wisdom, some vision that can see beyond the immediate cash grab that developments, even irresponsible ones, can bring.

We live in hope. I wish the new councils well in the discharge of their duties and responsibilities to the citizens whom they represent. Let's not take so much of what we have for granted and thrown it under the bus.

Birds in area

Following intense onshore winds in early October, Leach's storm-petrels were stranded in parking lots in Bonavista [Shawn Fitzpatrick] and at the Village Mall [Leanne Guzzwell].

On 29 August, Tony Lang was aboard a vessel about 140 km SSW of Cape St. Mary's. During 35 minutes in the evening he counted 86 Manx shearwaters, including a flock of about 30 birds loafing on the water. This amazing number is related the southern Buren Peninsula – Saint Pierre Miquelon area that is a hotspot for Manx shearwaters of local and of European origins.

Osprey are departing for their southern wintering grounds in Central and South America. The last one that I saw was circling at Mundy Pond on 22 September. Shorebirds too are moving southward. In late September, Carolyn Mayo photographed an active flock of semi-palmated sandpipers feeding on beach at Northern Bay Sands. In early October shorebird numbers were past peak at Musgrave Harbour on the Straight shore of Bonavista Bay. Sanderlings and semi-palmated sandpipers with a few dunlins and semi-palmated sandpipers were the remaining stragglers.

White bird reports - in early August, included a rare white morph common murre was photographed on Funk Island (Marina Montevicchi), and in September while out in his boat Darren English saw a white cormorant the water that flew to a flock of roosting cormorants (not sure if it is double-crested or great cormorant; Tony Power).

On 26 August, a great blue heron was at Cape Ray (Marina Montevicchi). Rich Nugent noted the unusual occurrence of a crow killing a blue jay on the north side of the Quidi Vidi gut. He also took down his summer bird feeder (hoorah Rich).

Birds I View columns are at <http://play.psych.mun.ca/~mont/outreach.html>. Contacts = mont@mun.ca, 695-5305 [c], 864-7673[w], 895-2901[h]