

An important step one



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By Nate Smelle

THERE is nothing more powerful within our potential as a species than a community when it bands together behind a common cause.

In the past week I have attended three separate meetings in North Hastings that compelled me to scrawl down this sentence on the back of a napkin in the parking lot of the Limerick Community Centre on Sunday night. The first inspirational assembly was a regular meeting of council in Hastings Highlands on Wednesday; next was the all-candidates meeting in Maynooth on Saturday morning; and third was Pancon's meeting regarding the proposed McBride mining project in Limerick on Sunday evening.

One of the reasons I felt so inspired at each one of these communal gatherings: there was not an empty seat left in the room. While it is no secret that Hastings Highlands is one of the most politically engaged communities in Hastings County, I was astounded by how passionate and well-informed the turnout in Limerick was on Sunday.

Over the years, I've been lucky enough to have attended several public meetings that provoked such a response in me. To name a few, Armatec's meeting in Harcourt back in 2014 regarding a proposed armoured vehicle testing site; the first public meeting regarding the proposed Freymond Quarry in Faraday Township in 2015; and the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority's meeting in early 2016 regarding a subdivision/biodiversity offsetting pilot project slated for the Thundering Waters slough forest wetland in Niagara Falls.

While each of these meetings left a mark on me in their own way, none has resonated with me so powerfully as did Pancon's McBride project meeting in Limerick on Sunday. With approximately 350 people in attendance ? some of who had to watch from outside through the windows ? the mere numbers were impressive on their own. When I arrived at the meeting, there were cars parked along the highway for nearly a kilometre in each direction leading to the Limerick Community Centre. Showing up early, I was shocked to see that the audience was already spilling out the front entrance doorway into the parking lot as they waited to get inside. Speaking with some of the folks in line, I found out that many of them had travelled hours to take part in a meeting.

When I asked them why it was so important for them to be there, they all basically said the same thing ? that they came to North Hastings to appreciate the peaceful beauty of the natural environment.

From the signs many of them were carrying ? some of which read ?Protect the Water,? and ?No jobs on a dead planet,? ? it was clear to me that most in the room had already made up their minds about the McBride project. This became even more obvious when Pancon president/CEO Layton Croft began speaking and was quickly shut down by a barrage of voices coming from the audience. Though I could not decipher where exactly each of the voices was coming from, almost all of them were alleging that Pancon's project lead geologist, Derek McBride and his crew had been flagging their property without notifying them.

This also surprised me because for at least the past few weeks, Pancon's website had stated that consultations with the community and the Alderville First Nation had commenced. Pancon's lack of consultation with the people of the Alderville First Nation was also

an issue for Chief James Marsden who spoke at the meeting. Despite what the website said, Marsden said Pancon had yet to engage in consultations with his community.

Sadly, it is far too common for corporations, and our government for that matter, to neglect properly consulting with First Nations and Indigenous communities before moving ahead with their own agendas.

As far as I'm concerned, before setting foot on anyone's land this should have been step one for Pancon.