

Residents argue restrictions for lake

By Sarah Sobanski

Possible Clark Lake restrictions to protect it as the Bancroft's water source were a heated topic of debate at the town's first public consultation.

A packed Club 580 seemed to lie in wait as deputy clerk and economic development co-ordinator Lianne Sauter made a presentation of options the town could pursue to protect Clark Lake.

The looming threat of zebra mussels brought the restrictions conversation to the council table in October. Councillor Mary Kavanagh tabled a motion to host a public meeting to gather input on proposed restrictions following news that the lake now has the potential to support the growth and spread of the invasive species.

'What if we had done nothing, said nothing, and zebra mussels got into the lake? Two years down the road we would have [asked] why didn't we do something,' Kavanagh said at the meeting. She noted zebra mussels were as close as Wollaston Lake.

Sauter said the town can maintain the status quo and look to signage projects and public education. It can close shore road allowances at different points around the lake to restrict public access, including its unofficial public beach. It can also apply to restrict watercrafts motorized or otherwise.

'[It's been there] for the last 100 years, and you're saying you're going to close the public beach give your head a shake,' said one resident as Sauter opened the floor to the public. 'Stop digging if you're in a hole.'

Kavanagh later called the impact of zebra mussels catastrophic and suggested to those gathered that if they thought the town was in debt now, they should imagine its financial trouble should the species get into the lake or the town's water plant.

'Once you got 'em honey, you got 'em for good,' said Kavanagh. 'We are trying to air on the side of caution.'

'There's no guarantee that you'll ever achieve what you're trying to do? Can you guarantee that there'll never be zebra mussels in there?' the resident interrupted.

'I don't believe it was the intent of council to restrict such things as swimming, kayaks, canoes, etcetera? Zebra mussels are usually in the propeller intakes or live-wells or those types of things? That was the source that was originally being targeted,' acting mayor Paul Jenkins attempted to soothe the rally of voices that went off as Sauter finished her presentation and opened the floor to the public. He noted the mussels were also in Paudash and Diamond Lake.

One community member who has owned property on the lake for 12 years pointed out that he's rarely seen motorized boats on the lake.

'In all of the years? There have been two occasions when a motor, in my recollection, has been on the lake,' he said.

In his experience, the culture around the lake is such that people use kayaks, canoes or electric motors not gas or diesel motors.

Others agreed but the town responded that Clark Lake is not legislated as a non-motorized lake.

He added, 'Don't change the culture of the lake, put signage saying please neighbour, welcome to our beautiful sanctuary just don't put a motor in our lake as a first step to try and protect it from invasive species.'

Sauter told *Bancroft This Week* getting non-motorized legislation has to be done at the federal level, which could take years.

'I can attest to the fact that all of the lake's property owners practice excellent stewardship skills. No one ever uses boats with gas motors and everyone does enjoy the lake,' said Ian Hendry, one of two permanent residents on the lake. 'A total ban of watercrafts in Clark Lake is not possible as there are two property owners who have only lake access.'

CAO Hazel Lambe told the meeting the town was looking for solutions from community members of how best to protect it.

'To protect the lake from zebra mussels, I would highly recommend that all motor boats be banned completely and that a cleaning station be built to clean visitors' watercrafts,' offered Hendry. He noted youth could be employed to look after the cleaning station.

Municipal staff will bring forward a report with recommendations following the public consultation. It will be submitted to council in February.