

Cottage living is dying in HH

To the Editor, You may remember the time when cottage opening was on the May 24th weekend and closing on Thanksgiving in early October. The cottage was decidedly rustic and while there was a wood stove, three seasons were always a challenge. I recall a weekend in late October opening the back door and seeing an icicle hanging from the kitchen tap. Most everything about the cottage from the cedar post foundation to the water system was decidedly basic and not built to year round housing standards. Yet we endured the challenges and many still do today ? the notion of a getaway in a more natural setting had a lot of appeal 100 years ago, and still does today. But the cottage site is evolving; as has legislation at the provincial level ? do you know you can't build a residence today without a certified heating system according to the Ontario Building Code? This model of a rustic rural waterfront summer only place has been changing for years, but as well as provincial legislation, COVID-19 has accelerated the shift dramatically.

Take communication. I recall a time when the only service we had was mail delivery, which was daily. Then party line phone, fuzzy TV service if you had a really high aerial. Today folks want quality TV, internet, phone service as a basic service.

And the demand for waterfront properties in the past year has skyrocketed. On our lake, we had a recent sale of a property listed at \$1.950 million in three days. So what do I mean by cottage living is dying? Never have folks had so much interest in non-urban property ownership ? and that should be a very good thing for us in HH.

Let's think about municipal responsibility to understand and respond to their constituent's needs. Our municipality has failed to discharge its obligations to keep up with societal trends; the facts are indisputable. Until 2016, the maximum boathouse allowed was 450 sq.ft., when it was finally increased to 600 responding to pressure from one lake. You would be hard pressed to buy a new boat today that will fit. Our land use by-laws are a hodgepodge of the five former townships put together in 2000 from legislation that was 30 years out of date then. And HH has never researched to see if they have a land use package that meets the needs of constituents. Many of our roads are not maintained by the municipality in the winter, yet they have multiple year round properties that have provided a huge increase in tax revenue to HH. The owners are forced to provide private servicing. HH simply hasn't stepped up to their responsibility to reflect the needs of the constituents who want property use year round. I could talk about the unenforced buffer zones, recent failed shoreline by-law, garages and other outbuildings, lot coverage issues, community facilities, fire services ? but I won't. This council is inhibiting our ability to compete for development with our neighbours who have grasped how important this planning is ? and they have taken steps to update. And this year is an election year in HH and this council would be well advised to consider how they plan to realign their approach with constituent's wishes, other waterfront communities with whom we compete for development, and quality environmental planning for a lakes based economy.

Our municipal neighbours from Muskoka to Rideau Lakes have done this. Our provincial government has done this through regular updates to the Ontario Building Code and their Provincial Policy Statement. After extensive delays, even the county updated their Official Plan in 2018. Why can't our council?

Bill Cheshire
Baptiste Lake