

Wollaston council hears from local lake association

By Kristena Schutt-Moore

Luke Mellors and Joanne Pozniak from the Wollaston Lake Homeowners and Cottagers Association came before Wollaston council on Tuesday, Feb. 14. They asked that the council provide financial assistance to support key invasive species containment activities. The association also asked to have a member of council to sit on their board to act as a point of contact for both council and the WLHCA to share information, updates and answer any questions. They also wanted to ask council, on behalf of their members, to reconsider reinstating the road grant that council rescinded in 2019. Council supported the WLHCA with a financial grant in 2021 to purchase specialized mats that would be placed on the patches of Milfoil that are growing in Wollaston Lake, as well as help remove the plants from the lake. The road grant that they asked council to bring back was a grant the township supported for care of private roads. This was to help take care of roadways within the township, even if they were not under township care. The goal was to make most, if not all, roads in the township accessible and passable for emergency vehicles. However, the council rescinded that grant in 2019 and stopped providing financial support to private road associations and committees that applied to the grant. The 2022 highlights the committee has accomplished was divided into three categories. Under the Milfoil Action Committee category was that committee completed its second year and the mechanical harvesting of the Milfoil pilot project drew attention from other lake associations including the Federation of Ontario Cottagers' Associations. They believe that this was the first mechanical harvesting of invasive species outside of the great lakes. Mellors said that the WLHCA, council and community should be proud to accomplish what townships with much larger lakes and resources have not been able to do. The education blitz at the boat launch, local schools and shared in local newspapers was also a success. The volunteers also held a Clean, Dry Awareness Drive. The Invasive Species Centre also presented the committee with a micro grant of \$1,000 to help fight against Milfoil. This year they are hoping to host a dunk tank at this year's Coe Hill Agricultural Fair. This will be used to raise funds to remove invasive species from the lake as well as share information on how to preserve the health of the lake. The volunteers are also looking at putting up new signage at the Wollaston Lake public boat launch, as well as fundraising with community partners. The committee is now looking for volunteers from the community for the dunk tank and also asked council members to participate. In the lake health category, the WLHCA were able to add five new lakes in Wollaston Township to the MECP Lake Partner Program. This means that Deer River headwaters, Urbach Lake, Ragged Lake, Casteroil Lake and Finnican Lake are being measured for water quality. Volunteers collect phosphorous samples and make monthly water clarity observations of the lakes. This information is then shared on the FOCA and Ontario websites. Three of those lakes have completed water quality tests and dissolved oxygen tests done on them. The volunteers also started a review of Urbach Lake's water level, and it is suspected that beaver activity is the cause of the one-metre rise in the lake over the past two to three years. The WLHCA also completed the first draft of the Wollaston State of the Lake water quality trend analysis and the public consultation will be in June 2023. This year they were also able to develop new relationships with the Invasive Species Centre of Ontario, and presented at Watersheds Canada Lake Links 2022. They were also able to host a barbeque and silent auctions that raised over \$2,000 for the community and work on the lakes. Mellors continued on to say that at the current rate of spending to manage the invasive species in Wollaston Lake it is not sustainable. Which was connected to one of the requests the WLHCA had for council. Mellors said that they need to find ways to develop financial support to keep the health of the lake where it needs to be. Last year the WLHCA spent \$6,000 on Milfoil Removal then what was fundraised, and that funding came from membership dues, which also goes towards water testing, community education and communications. The association asked the council to consider supporting their work against invasive species in its 2023 budget; and to assign a member of council to act as a delegate of council on the WLHCA's executive committee for ongoing discussions. The association also wanted to provide support for the township's septic inspection program, and asked that the council call on them if and when they needed support. They asked that the council continue to partner with the WLHCA by allowing signage at the public boat launch for new watercraft regulations, placing a waste container at the boat launch for the removal of Milfoil from water craft and continuing to help create awareness and support for lake health. The other request was to bring back the road grant that the township maintained for several years before the council removed it in 2019. WLHCA said in their presentation that this grant was critical to maintain safe roads and keep them clear. Council accepted the WLHCA presentation as information and will review the financial requests as part of the 2023 budget deliberations.