

Wollaston to stop Hydro One herbicide use

By Jim Eadie

In a remarkable example of quick grassroots organizing for the public good, a citizen group has convinced Wollaston Township council to pass a resolution requesting Hydro One not spray herbicides within the township boundaries, including township road allowances and township property. In addition, the group has asked council to draft a bylaw prohibiting such spraying to cover future requests for permission to spray.

In early January, residents began receiving letters and phone calls from Hydro One asking for the agreement of landowners affected by their tree clearing on Hydro One power line corridors, including the use of Garlon RTU herbicide to slow re-growth of vegetation.

'We got a phone call, and then a letter just after Christmas,' said local resident Linda Patterson. 'I called a friend Tia Alexander, and they had a letter too. We didn't want this herbicide near our homes, wells and gardens.'

Alexander posted their concern on Facebook, and soon a number of concerned people came to a meeting called by Patterson to get more organized.

Spokesperson Paul Ordanis led a large delegation to the Jan. 24 Wollaston council meeting and presented a letter endorsed by more than 100 local residents asking for the ban.

'It took us less than a week to get more than 10 per cent of the residents to sign on and we are collecting more names every day,' said Ordanis. 'People come to this area to enjoy the natural setting, to swim in our lakes and rivers. A lot of them fish and hunt and consume the fish and game. It is important to protect the health of that environment. Almost all the residents we have talked to see this as a Hydro One shortcut in exchange for exposing our community to chemical compounds that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has linked to increased rates of breast tumors. It is not a chance we are willing to take. It is not fair to the families and children who live here. Wollaston Township's official slogan is: 'Live naturally. Play naturally.' Residents want this to stand for something.'

Ordanis also pointed out that several other municipalities in Ontario have taken this step recently.

A resolution to contact Hydro One with a letter was passed by council unanimously.

'Council showed real leadership yesterday in their support of the community request,' said Ordanis the following day. 'Make no mistake, we are here for the long haul, and will make sure the new policy is respected.'

'However, we are cautiously optimistic that the township responded so well to this citizen initiative to protect our community,' said Gail Dugas, who was part of the delegation. 'We will be actively monitoring, and spreading the message to other townships as well. Our clean water and land in Wollaston Township is an asset that we have to protect. If we do it well, we can play an important part in the development of the area and make it a wealthy and welcoming place.'

Nancy Clark, communications officer for Hydro One told *Bancroft This Week* that they are now in the planning phase of a 29 kilometre corridor vegetative management plan, for the safe operation and access to Hydro One lines in the area. She noted the utility has now been in touch with the municipality, and will continue communicating with residents and offering clarification about their plans.

Wollaston Township clerk Jennifer Cohen confirmed that a Hydro One representative has contacted the municipal office, and will be attending the Feb. 28 regular council meeting to answer questions.