

Northeast Avalon Times October 2019

Rural community values and integrity need council support
Birds I View
Bill Montevocchi



It's fair to say that most people who live on the northeast Avalon appreciate the rural and coastal life styles of our communities. We enjoy being outside the rant and the roar of heavy traffic, bustling commerce and loud noise where we can inhale the fresh clean that our environment provides.

It is less evident that town councils always share the same appreciation though some certainly do more and some do less than others. The focal issue of this column is coastal rural community valuation.

I am not a political jockey or expert, so I can't consider all councils and all issues. What I will do is reflect on my own community of Portugal Cove – St. Philips and what we are doing, what we are not doing and in my opinion what we could and should be doing better.

Let me begin by acknowledging that our town has a magnificent user-friendly website, staff, chamber of commerce and council. And while some of what I will discuss here is in some instances blunt, the criticisms are offered with perspective that it is our collective responsibility to nurture and protect our rural community environment and life style. We are all in it together. It's our hometown.

Our website underscores “our small town charm and magic” and highlights “some of the most spectacular views in Newfoundland and Labrador” where you can “Surround yourself with the unspoiled ocean and craggy coastlines that border the beautiful town of Portugal Cove-St. Philip's; where whales come to frolic in the frothy sea; birds swoop in to rest on our picturesque shores.”

While that is true and while we value these things, it's worrisome that there are so few places where can you actually take in and appreciate this natural magnificence. The town wharves can be fascinating but they are not people-friendly.

We need some the shoreline green areas with benches and picnic tables. Our residents and visitors want to enjoy the coastal wonders in a peaceful and relaxing atmosphere. Let's provide them with the opportunities. And why not consider an open air gazebo or two for outings on rainy days.

There are places to make gentle interventions without spiralling into a developmental frenzy. Potential green sites for such development are adjacent to both the Portugal Cove and St. Philips wharves.

Our jewel of Beachy Cove is featured as a tourism destination, yet no effort has been put in to a creating a natural pathway as we have on the east coast trail. Not a picnic table, not a trash bin ... nothing. We do indeed need to value this special place.

Development and environment

We are in a climate crisis. Each of us has to all that she or he can to adapt and cope with environmental change. We are fortunate to have some wetlands that cleanse water, support a diversity of aquatic and marsh species and provide natural protection from flooding.

Yet the PCSP council has commissioned a study to re-do a section of the town's flood risk mapping. Are council and developers with eye on the wetland concerned that we have too much wetland in this time of climate crisis? This sort of expenditure is out of touch with our community's long-term needs.

Council is also entertaining a proposal to rezone more than 10 hectares of coastal forest off of Tucker's Hill. Such a venture will not sustain the rural strength of our community. We need coastal forests and natural unencumbered land and seascapes

Most importantly, we don't need developers to provide the moral compass for our communities' progression. We can do better by valuing what we have and nurturing well-being and growth. And much of this is happening. We need to do more.

Many options for moving forward

All councils have to free themselves from the grip of having to ever exponentially increase budgets, taxes and revenues. Progress can occur of its own accord in a vibrant rural community environment. People want to come here.

Many residents including many younger ones are running and starting creative small businesses and dining venues. A vibrant rural community attracts and stimulates such business

and creativity. We all could benefit from an open market to support local farmers, fishers and crafts people. It's not hard to envision.

The Tilt House bakery and Murray's Farm do much to support our local economy by helping local writers, artists, artisans and crafts people to sell their wares. Our town can follow suit.

We've everything going for us, so let's stop the developmental madness. Let's stop filling in wetlands and destroying coast forested enclaves for more tax dollars. Let's embrace our community values and let's move forward in an economically and environmentally rational way. We can do it. We must.

Leach's storm-petrels are at risk

During September and October millions of young storm –petrels are leaving their nesting burrows on Baccalieu Island at the mouth of Conception Bay. The birds are nocturnal and have fatal light-attraction.

The tropical storm winds of 21 September stranded tiny storm-petrels in the area. Many were picked up in the Village Mall parking (Emily Coulburne), the St. John's Airport (Kara Gerrow), Kelligrews (Carmen Anderson), Red Head Cove (Darren Rice), Musgrave Harbour and here in Portugal Cove. An Adventure Canada vessel that came into St. John's Harbour on 2 October had about 40 storm-petrels on board as they had passed by Baccalieu Island the night before. Most were released (Mark Mallory).

In Bay de Verde, Sherry Green has worked tirelessly and selflessly saving stranded storm-petrels. She picked up 25 storm-petrels on the Bay de Verde wharf on 25 September when tuna vessels were landing their catches. CWS picked up Sherry's birds plus seven and released them in Witless Bay (Pierre Ryan, Marina Montevecchi).

On the nights of 7-8 and 8-9 October, Pierre Ryan, Marina Montevecchi and SherryGreen picked about 60 live storm-petrels and many dead ones in Bay de Verde around the Quinlan Fish Plant. The birds are attracted to the lights on the plant, wharf and on fishing boats, and efforts are being made to minimize all these light sources and keep them off when they are not needed.

Some stranded storm-petrels were released on a wing and prayer at night in Portugal Cove (Emily Colbourne, Marina Montevecchi). These releases provide a second chance for a bird that would have otherwise died on land – a second chance and hopefully the gift of life.

Other Birds in the Area

More than 100 greater scaup and ring-necked ducks have been resting on Murray's Pond. They seem to be taking shelter there during the hunting season. On 28 September Richard Northcott photographed a glossy ibis on Ramea. The southern bird was likely assisted here by the winds of Hurricane Dorian. Migratory flocks of palm warblers were flitting around Musgrave Harbour at the end of September.

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