

Northeast Avalon Times February 2021

The planned deconstruction of a rural community

Birds I View

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A number of sightings of the redwings were made across the island in January and February. Redwings nest in Iceland and eastern Europe. (photo: ebird Gina Sheridan)

Like many people in my town and like many people in the communities on the northeast Avalon, I love where I live. I am enthralled with expanses of boreal forests and open tundra, coastal cliffs and some relatively unimpeded waterways. The breathtaking panorama overlooking the Blast Hole Ponds and the forests rolling to Bauline and Pouch Cove is a local treasure.

On a daily basis, I appreciate the forests surrounding Neary's Pond, Round Pond, Beachy Cove Brook and the meadows, forests and tundra on and around Beach Cove Mountain. I am not the only one.

It is exceedingly obvious that in our day and age that rural communities don't just happen. Development and environmental modification are everywhere. My grandchildren will grow up unaware of the former natural environment around St. John's airport where forests are cleared, marshes filled and waterways diverted, buried and destroyed. I find it deeply distressing to witness this wanton destruction. I am not the only one.

The integrity of a rural community has to be valued among its residents. And most especially among those who for brief periods (much shorter than the regeneration of forest or development of a wetland) have decision-making roles on town councils.

This is not always the case. Clearly this is not the case in the most recent municipal and developmental plan amendments by the Portugal Cove St. Phillips council (<https://pcsp.ca/site/uploads/2021/01/Ad-Public-Consultation-MPA-11-and-DRA-16.pdf>). Going through these documents, it is difficult to find any recognition or even appreciation of what a rural community is about.

In 2013, government accepted the St. John's Urban Region (Agriculture) Development Area Review which recommended 6 area re-designations from agricultural to residential in PCSP. It is important to understand that those recommendations were home grown by PCSP councils. It is also important to clarify that a recommendation is simply that – a recommendation. It is not an authorization.

On this basis the council will re designate approximately 808 acres in the agricultural zone to residential - west of Portugal Cove Road, between Old Broad Cove Road, Beachy Cove Road, Beachy Cove Brook and Pond and Neary's Pond Road and Round Pond Road. Within this area they now want another 193 acres for re-designation from agricultural to residential, bringing the total transition to more than 1000 acres. Across Portugal Cove Road from Murray's Pond, a marshland that should be protected is being infilled and has been recommended for mixed development. The amendments have also removed 2 areas adjacent to Winsor Lake from watershed protection. This action is consistent with council's continued ignoring of forest buffer protection adjacent to waterways, contrary to section E of the town plan.

These details can be checked on the maps on line, though some color schemes are user-unfriendly, and I cannot find the rezoning of agricultural areas to protect the Windsor Lake watershed. If you want to envision a longer view of the council's developmental inclinations, here are some of their targets - Anglican Cemetery Road, Farm Road/Churchills Road, Carew Drive/Old Cart Road, Neary's Pond/Western Round Pond, Old Broad Cove Road West, Mitchell's

Pond/Hugh's Pond, Thorburn Road/Skinner's Road, St. Thomas Line, Tucker's Hill, Voisey's Brook Park.

Such an environmental onslaught makes it incumbent on council to clarify their vision for our community. From my perspective, their view looks like the Paradise model of suburban development, where miniscule green spaces are difficult to find. There has to be a realization that rural communities can prosper without unfettered development and without obliterating the boreal forests and wetlands in which we are imbedded.

The previous and the most recent planned deconstruction proposals are open for public input until 23 February. Not much should be expected given the council's statement – "The public can provide any comments or concerns on the amendments to the Town Office in writing before Council proceeds with adoption." There has to be another way.

With little expectation, my concerns are given above and my comment to council is – please get a grip and get back to basics with an aim, direction and commitment for protecting the rural integrity and prosperity of our community. I am not the only one.

The turr hunt

The turr hunt is a long-standing privileged tradition in Newfoundland and Labrador. Besides being treasured today as local delicacy, murre (and seals) helped sustain residents of coastal communities during winter.

To help support the hunt, I have distributed 1000s of paper hunt information placements created by Intervale Associates of Doyles in western Newfoundland to restaurants, social clubs, schools, tourism venues, fishers and hunters on the east and northeast coasts. Having about a 1,000 or so remaining, I posted on facebook asking if anyone would like some (see www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10159694918636535&set=g.115356961925140). The response was staggering and came from around the island, Labrador and across Canada.

The thin paper placemats can be laminated more permanent use. They look grand under a feed of turr. After my mail-outs from the facebook response, there might still be a few remaining, so let me know if you might want a few.

Birds in the area

A new bird arrived in our yard on 25 January - a song sparrow was feeding on the periphery of the junco flock. The novel visitor returned for a few but has not been seen since the cold winter conditions snapped back in. Bohemian waxwings have also been visiting the area. In St. John's on 24 January, sixty descended on Barry Darby's dogberry tree (actually I am told by Helen Forsey - a catberry from Great Burin).

Former DFO cod scientist and now intrepid birder, John Bratney created the most excitement with his discovery and photographs of a redwing among robins on Beech Place on 24 January. The bird stayed in the immediate area about a week.

Redwings breed in Iceland and northern Europe and are rarely sighted in Newfoundland. Yet at about the same time as the St. John's sighting, another redwing was photographed in Felix Cove on the Port au Port Peninsula on the west coast. Interestingly, Chrys Hogan reported another in Musgrave Harbour.

All totalled according to Jared Clarke, there have been about 23 sightings of Redwing on the island of Newfoundland - almost all of them in winter. I was with Bruce Mactavish when we recorded the very first on 25 June 1980 in Goose Cove on the tip of the northern peninsula. Of all the sightings, this has been the only summer occurrence and the bird was singing.

As this article goes to press, Lancy Chang has photographed and reported a slaty-backed gull at Quidi Vidi Lake. These gulls occur primarily in Japan, Korea and western Alaska!

Thoreau wrote that there were two ways to see the world. One way is to travel around it, and the other is to watch grow through your garden. When it comes to birds, you can either travel the world or keep looking in Newfoundland.

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