

***Northeast Avalon Times March 2021***

**Mitigating the desecration of a rural community**

**Birds I View**

**Bill Montevecchi**



Legend has it the kittiwakes return to Cape St. Mary's on St. Patrick's Day.

(photo: Bill Montevecchi)

People living on the Northeast Avalon highly value the rural nature of their communities. They want to preserve and protect them. They are well aware of the prosperity and quality of life that such strategic vision and planning can endow.

My February column about the rezoning of lands from agricultural to residential in Portugal Cove – St. Philips received considerable positive feedback. Based on what I heard, people are concerned that this rezoning sets a precedent that will continue the erosion of the rural character of our community. Here are some considerations that could temper the circumstances.

To maintain a community's rural character, town plans need strict adherence. Agreements and commitments require follow through. Neither appears to be the case concerning the current rezoning in Portugal Cove – St. Philips.

A goal of section 2.3 Environment of the town plan is to "Provide for the protection, preservation, and sustainability of the natural environment in locations throughout the community and in the manner that new growth and development is managed." The environmental objectives of the plan include - "Restrict or prohibit development in environmentally sensitive areas such as ocean and pond shorelines, waterways, steep slopes, drainage areas and wetlands. Adequately control development around ponds, lakes and bodies of water."

According to Articles 3.2.1.b and c, areas proposed for development must not include sites that are environmentally sensitive (e.g. waterways, wetlands) and that alter the natural landscape or water supply.

It is objectively apparent throughout the town that the Portugal Cove – St. Philips council has not enforced the shoreline provision, and it appears that they are over-riding the developmental provisions as well.

Until the Portugal Cove – St. Philips town plan includes a comprehensive inventory of the wetlands that require protection in the community, the land re-designations that they propose are premature. The large proposed residential area includes well known waterways and wetlands. Beachy Cove Brook that flows into Beachy Cove Pond and the large wetland that local skiers and snowshoe-ers refer to as Janet's Bog are cases in point.

Yet even beyond this gap in environmental information, the rezoning of land from agricultural to residential appears to be in direct violation of the framework for municipal planning as outlined in the policies of the St. John's Urban Region Regional Plan. The Portugal Cove – St. Philips town council needs to complete a comprehensive review of the release of agricultural lands in the community before the land is re-designated.

This has not been done. So it is unclear on what basis the council has proceeded or even if they can proceed any further without attending to this stipulation. Until this review is completed, the agricultural land in the Neary's Pond Road area should not be designated as residential. This because until the proposed land use review is completed, the municipal plan adheres to the previous and current agricultural land boundaries, and to the St. John's Agricultural Development Plan.

Concerns have also been expressed about the possible development of the 21-acre site at the abandoned chicken farm on Neary's Pond Road. These concerns focus on environmental contamination associated with the former ponds of chicken waste, ammonia, animal discards, pesticides and chemicals. The rationale way to proceed requires a comprehensive environmental assessment to ensure public safety.

Should more housing development even be a priority in Portugal Cove – St. Philips? Given the under-utilized Round Pond development in the immediate area of the large rezoning area, one has to question the council's decision. The opening of the Round Pond development included an excessive blasting program that ruined the water supply of a number of residences in the area. This too is an outstanding problem that the council has yet to address.

There are many problems that need to be addressed by the Portugal Cove – St. Philips town council before the proposed land rezoning and development plans can move forward. I look forward to their responsible actions in these matters. I am not the only one.

### **Birds in the area**

On 23 February Todd Hollett spotted a juvenile gannet in Lewin's Cove on the Placentia Bay side of the Burin Peninsula. The sighting was unusual for two reasons. First, there is only one other record of a gannet sighting in Newfoundland during February that was in 1970. Second, young gannets usually show up in our waters after the adults.

On 2 March, Richard Northcott found a redwing on Ramea. He also sent notes of some previous sighting including a cardinal on 12 December and 4 January, and shrike in February.

Marlene Creates had a close encounter of the feathered kind when a tiny golden-crowned kinglet bumped into a window outside her study and maintained eye to eye contact before flying off. A flock of purple finches including both "boys and girls" have been showing up as Aspen Montevecchi's feeder on Boulder Lane in Portugal Cove.

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