

Northeast Avalon Times February 2018

**New PCSP council off to a promising start
Birds I View
Bill Montevecchi**



Purple finches have been visiting winter feeders on the NE Avalon (photo: Rick West)

While it was the case not so long ago that not a single candidate even mentioned the environment in their election brochures and interviews, the 2018 budget promises much more. The council has offered increased funding to the town's industrious Advisory Committee on the Environment (ACE) chaired by Dick Whitaker, has committed to water quality testing in ponds and streams, and has agreed to engage climate change studies. While council rescinded the mandatory residential water-metering project, they are exploring zone metering alternatives and evaluating the option of a voluntary metering pilot project.

Tough choices will needed during the council's tenure, including wetland protection and the adequate tree line buffering along ponds and streams that are standardly ignored in

essentially all developments. Hopefully a consistent environmental perspective will allow matters to be resolved for the better.

The cancelling the mega Maggie's Place depot is another step that will benefit the local environment. It is encouraging to see this sort of conservative decision rather an open-ended approach that promotes what may be unnecessary and unwanted expansion of town infrastructure. More green town truck buzzing and idling round the town is not a productive goal or end game for a rural community. Conservative decisions like these have also allowed council to lower taxes which is always a welcomed relief shared by all in the face of ever increasing town tolls, which were often invoked with minimally convincing rationale.

Clearly, this is a honeymoon period for council but it is also a time for setting goals, establishing priorities and for taking incisive initiatives. As a provincial cabinet minister once advised me, the first six months of a new government's time in office provides the best opportunity for new ventures and directions. It is all too soon before things tend to bog down in bureaucratic machinations, petty and larger conflicts and the like.

And when the going gets more difficult it is essential to have a strategy and a plan to rely on to help guide available options, and most importantly to avoid the alternative of crisis management. Owing to the diligence and vision of the previous council, we have such a strategy – the town plan. And for the reasons alluded to, it would be reckless on council's part to support a pending motion to allow council the latitude to make decisions that are contrary to the town plan.

Strong governance has to be bounded with a robust system of checks and balances. Without these citizens can be governed by the short-term erratic follies of idiosyncratic and transient councils. Town plans envision the long-term goals for community development and conservation, and efforts to wrangle exceptions however small or large can only set precedents for the deterioration of good governance.

It is most encouraging to witness the initiatives being taken by young entrepreneurs trends in sustainable business in communities all over the northeast Avalon. Comprehensive town plans that help ensure both developmental and environment integrity facilitate community progress and this trend of rural community regeneration. We have lots of opportunities.

Tuck-Walters Award

The pinnacle accolade of Nature NL is the Tuck-Walters Award. Named in honour of Les Tuck and Captain Harry Walters. At the time of confederation, Tuck and Walters played pivotal roles in wildlife conservation in our newly established province. Tuck who had served as Newfoundland's last dominion wildlife officer took over as the Canadian Wildlife Service biologist, and Walters who was the head of the Newfoundland Rangers took charge of the Newfoundland Wildlife Division.

This year's award went to the Whale Release and Strandings Group led by Wayne Ledwell and Julie Huntington for their efforts in releasing whales entangled in fishing gear. Jim

Wellman, former host of the Fisheries Broadcast and Editor of the Navigator, was on hand to reap praise on the whale release efforts and to remind us of how the program was initiated by Jon Lien in the 1980s. Lien's role and an elegant historic overview of the whale release program in the province was delivered by his wife Judy. Huntington and Ledwell inherited the whale release program when Jon Lien handed it off. They've made it their own and in the process developed an expertise and a skill set that has been praised far and wide.

I can attest to Ledwell's skill in handling boats in challenging circumstances when he came to rescue me and my crew off Funk Island a few years ago. The gales had been howling from the northeast for weeks. Around the island the pounding turbulence of surf and spray precluded any thought of safe departure. At a single narrow site on the southeast side the white water would recede for a minute or so from time to time. Here there was chance of negotiating a zodiac close enough so that one could make a jump from the rock to boat. Wayne working with Larry Easton's fishing crew got the job done in an efficient and effective manner, and it wasn't long before we were all aboard the long-liner and on the way home.

We are fortunate to have the Whale Release and Strandings Group in our province. It is a small business venture created and home-grown on the northeast Avalon. As the cod fishery reopens and expands its efforts and the gillnets are returned to coastal waters, we can anticipate more whale entanglements and entrapments. Huntington and Ledwell should be busy for some time to come. We offer them congratulations and wish them well.

Birds in the area

Waxwings are showing up in some places to exploit the dogberry crops. In Portugal Cove, Ruth Bugden on Neary's Pond Road and Wendy Decker on Old Broad Cove Road had cedar waxwing flocks in their yards. Large flocks of waxwings and goldfinches were also seen on Western Gulley Road (Dick Whitaker).

The only colorful exception to our standard feeder crew of juncos, flickers, blue jays and chickadees was a male purple finch brightened our feeder in mid-January.

Birds I View columns are at <http://play.psych.mun.ca/~mont/outreach.html>. Contacts = mont@mun.ca, 695-5305 [c], 864-7673[w], 895-2901[h]