SEPTAGE FACT VERSUS MYTH

by Barry Hendry

For the September 7 session of Hastings Highlands (HH) Council Councillor Lorraine Fell had prepared a list of facts vs rumours for the benefit of all in response to requests from some ratepayers. Her statement had input from staff and she explained that her conclusions were her own.

In her preamble Fell stated, "I have had a number of phone calls from Papineau Lake residents...telling me they would like to hear more factual information, or, as one resident put it, 'Hastings Highlands' side of the story.'

In the gallery at this meeting were 10 members of the Papineau Lake Cottagers' Association (PLCA) including its President Harold Harris and Vice President Ian Salgo.

The councillor explained, "Despite rumours to the contrary, the Ministry of the Environment (MOE) considers a trenching system a safe and acceptable method to dispose of septage... In Algonquin Park a system has been operating effectively for many years. The system in Highlands East has been operating for eight years, and in fact, the MOE has approved over 1,000 trenching systems in Ontario, according to our consultants."

Fell provided some background on the issue including that the lake association protest began before council had received the report of its consultants and before it had accepted the consultant's recommendation to use a Papineau site for the proposed trenches. Soon after this point the municipality's lawyer informed council of possible legal action if it pursued the Papineau site.

Fact: "Clear cutting acreage for trenches depends on the location and terrain. At this 200 acre site consultants estimate three to five acres need to be cleared, not the 10 acres as presented by the PLCA. Septage trucks already travel our roads." Fell used a Highlands East example of six or seven trucks a week to their site and suggest a nearly similar rate or slightly higher for her municipality.

Fell added, "Road building for this site is minimal. Given the minimal truck traffic, the further suggestions of noise pollution would appear insignificant."

On the issue of odour at the site Fell reminded the gallery that the PLCA executives who attended the Cardiff area site observed, "There was no smell or odour, even when standing beside trenches recently filled with septage."

Finally, the rumour - "When a heavy rain occurs the run-off can flood over the trenches and over the land polluting the soil."

According to Fell's research, "This has not happened, and it can't happen. The trenches are built with a slope and to specific dimensions. Only a set number of gallons may be pumped in to fill 75 per cent of the capacity, leaving 25 per cent of space to take care of excessive rainfall."

See Fact Versus Myth On Page 5
Fell provided some background on the issue including that the lake association protest began before council had received the report of its consultants and before it had accepted the consultant's recommendation to use a Papineau site for the proposed trenches. Soon after this point the municipality's lawyer informed council of possible legal action if it pursued the Papineau site for the system.

Fell continued, "Meanwhile, the PLCA had been given a tour of the operation at Highlands East and were favourably impressed, except they felt our operation should be built 'somewhere else'; hence the NIMBY label applied to Papineau residents in the newspaper."

"In fact at both delegations to council, the PLCA provided no factual objections to operating this system at the Papineau site."

"As a council, our lakes are considered our greatest asset. We would not consider an operation if there were any possibility of having a detrimental affect on any of our lakes or residents. Furthermore, the MOE would not grant us a Certificate of Approval (C of A) in the first place unless we met their criteria for an environmentally safe operation."

"That said," Fell continued, "it has come to our attention, verbally, and from the PLCA Web site that rumour and mis-information about this project distorts the facts. Therefore I wish to present the following to clarify and allay some of your concerns."

Fell quoted this rumour first: At risk the "Safety and security of pets and children who may trespass the unmonitored site, or walk and play on the proposed truck route."

"There is no public access to a septage site," Fell said. "Like Highlands East, it will be a fenced-in area, gated and locked. Our by-law does not allow dogs at large. Walking or playing on the road can place anyone at risk to traffic. A site is monitored by the site manager; only licensed septage haulers are admitted to by appointment with the manager and only septage from Hastings Highlands (HH) will be accepted. The MOE requires monitoring wells be strategically placed which are regularly tested for annual reports to the MOE."

Fell's rumour #2 read "Site development will require clear cutting dense forest and building a road with significant increase in truck
Septage Fact Versus Myth

Cont'd From Page 2

"It takes one year for a trench to completely dry up and to look like pieces of dry cardboard. More septage can be added to the trench or the residue can be applied to a landfill and covered. After a used trench remains fallow for one year it can be used again."

Fell concluded, "If we are to act with due diligence, we must deal with facts rather than speculation and fear. It is disturbing to some members of council that the Papineau Lake Executive presented no factual basis for their objection. They had nothing but praise and satisfaction with the Highlands East site. True, they may now find another equally acceptable site submitted by a private landowner. But residents would be aware that it could be enormously more expensive for all HH ratepayers, especially if no one else wants a septage site close to their backyard."