

Change is Coming in Musquodoboit Harbour

By Richard Bell

The public will get their first chance to hear development details on a major new development project in Muquodoboit Harbour at an HRM Planning “public information meeting” on January 17, 2024, at the Eastern Shore Community Centre, 67 Park Road, Musquodoboit Harbour, at 7:00pm. This meeting was originally scheduled for December 18, 2023, but was cancelled because of weather.

The meeting is part of the process where HRM reviews approval of a development agreement to allow the subdivision of a 7.2 acre lot that will be the new home of the Birches Nursing Home as a 48-unit shared housing with special care facility. This development agreement and the building of the new Birches is happening in parallel with a multi-year construction of a new residential and commercial development called Harbour Garden Village on land adjacent to the new Birches site.

There are four principal players in this story: the HRM Planning Department, Province of Nova Scotia, the Birches Nursing Home, and John Wesley

Chisholm. Two of these players drove the action: PNS agreed to follow through with the promise of the previous liberal government to replace the aging Birches Nursing Home. And John Wesley Chisholm, who is on a mission to realize a long-simmering vision of building a dense, walkable community and commercial housing development in the scruffy woods behind the Musquodoboit Railway Museum.

The property in question is a 47-acre parcel of land (PID 40192528). The Musquodoboit Harbour Farmers Market has long sought to put up a permanent, all-season building right across the railroad tracks from the museum. And a prior owner of the parcel had gone as far as laying out a plan to build dozens of units of housing in a complex designed for seniors.

Most well known as a TV producer and musician, Chisholm has produced over 500 TV shows often about ocean science, shipwrecks, and history for the National Geographic and the Discovery Channel. Locally, he is most well-known for his 11 season series Hope

for Wildlife. But Chisholm has been a long-time investor in other businesses and properties including the Lawtons in MH.

Chisholm has owned property and been part of the MH community for 25 years. About two years ago, he saw that the property behind the Railway Museum was for sale. He started talking with community members about local needs, and how developing the site could provide a vital new core of housing and community services. Out of these discussions, Chisholm birthed the idea that evolved into his proposal to build Harbour Garden Village.

A November 7, 2023, cover letter to HRM Planning from the consulting firm representing Chisholm, describes the Harbour Garden Village project as follows:

“The vision for the future Harbour Garden Village development is to provide craftsman style housing and create a community where it is possible to live, work, walk and play. Enclaves of clustered housing around a square of shops and offices will be specifically

designed to support local economic development and foster interaction between neighbours.

“Harbour Garden Village could consist of six enclaves each with 12 single family homes, as well as four sets of row houses each with 6 units and four apartment buildings, each made up of 6 apartment units and six shops. Overall, this would result in 72 single family homes, 24 row houses, 24 apartments, and 24 commercial spaces (each 600 square feet) for a total of 120 residential units. Within the village there would also be a boutique hotel with 24 rooms, space for the community farmers market, woodshop, botanical garden, self storage barn and raised deck parking with 100 spaces.” On the development website, there’s details about weaving 24, community-managed, affordable homes into the project.

Even with his business experience Chisholm says this unique ‘outside the box’ property development is a new challenge.

...continued on next page

Gaetz Brook Legion’s New Year’s Day Levee

People attending the New Year’s Day Levee at the Gaetz Brook Legion had a great time.

Apparently Moose Milk is an important staple at the Levee. Everyone was in line for that drink. (It was delicious)

One Night Stand provided the music and they did not disappoint. They had people

on their feet dancing away.

And as usual the lunch provided was delicious and plentiful. They have a membership who always outdoes themselves at legion events.

This was my first Levee at the legion and I will be back!



After 64 Years Don and Marina Withers Leave Musquodoboit Harbour

Don and Marina Withers moved to Musquodoboit Harbour 64 years ago. Don’s dad, Fred Withers was the United Church minister. After a few years they built a home on East Petpeswick Road with a basement apartment for the senior Withers.

Through the years they added greatly to the life and work of the community. They sang in the United Church choir for many years.

Don added substantially to electrical work for the building of the First United Church. Marina was very active in the UCW and Bible Study group.

Don worked for Nova Scotia Power and Marina, although an R.N., was a stay-at-home Mom.

They are both very talented artistically. Don wood carved many unique pieces as well as teaching some of his friends. Their house was adorned with many of Don’s paintings.

Marina’s talent was in handwork such as quilts, knitting and dress making. She



Marina Withers, Rev. Joan Griffin and Don Withers

was part of the Anderson House birth and took part in Seaside Christmas for many years.

They are the type of people who offered heart and soul to friends, neighbours and strangers. They will be dearly missed in the community.

A reception was held for them at the First United Church on Sunday, November 26 after Sunday service. Everyone wished them well on their move.

Marina is originally from Lunenburg and Don from Saint John, New Brunswick. They met at a United Church Youth Group gathering. They are now residing in Bridgewater near their daughter.

...Change is Coming Continued

But the process got much more complicated after Chisholm learned that the province wanted the Birches Nursing Home to relocate to a new facility quickly. “People were telling me they didn’t want the Birches to move away from Musquodoboit Harbour,” Chisholm said in a late December interview, “and I thought being located next to Harbour Garden Village could benefit both the residents and the staff of the new Birches. So, I approached them.”

Chisholm initially offered a 4-acre parcel fronting on Highway 7 to the Birches for free. But after looking at the site, and inspecting the rest of the property, the Birches asked Chisholm for a 7.2 acre parcel higher up and off Highway 7, which Chisholm agreed to provide the prime property for free if the province could kick in some money to support the new public roads that the project would require.

Still, HRM Planning would have to agree to “subdivide” the existing lot and complete a development agreement. And as developers had been complaining about for years, getting through the subdivision process was often a time-consuming, difficult, and frustrating process.

While these negotiations were proceeding, the province was growing more and more frustrated with the notorious slowness of the entire HRM Planning approval process, and passed legislation on November 5, 2021, giving the Minister of Housing (John Lohr) the power to designate Special Planning Areas within HRM where the Minister would be in charge. On March 22, 2022, Lohr approved the first nine special planning areas across HRM. And on January 17, 2023, Lohr approved the designation of a tenth Special Planning Area for the 47-acre parcel of land intended as the future home of the Birches and Harbour Garden Village.

When Lohr issued this designation, Chisholm hoped that HRM Planning

would move quickly to approve the subdivision, given how hard the province was pushing on the Birches to get “shovels in the ground.”

Lohr, however, proved reluctant to use his new powers, after some ferocious push-back from HRM Mayor Savage the HRM Council, who made it very clear how angry and upset they were about the province’s naked power grab.

So, well into the fall of 2023, it remained unclear whether HRM Planning would sign off on subdividing the lot before the province insisted that the Birches find another site.

Now, as the PNS and city are closer to an agreement, the city has scheduled a required public engagement meeting to share the details of the plan, explain what’s been done so far in terms of studies, reports, and design, and get public feedback on the new Birches build.

The Birches is now projecting a spring start to the new project, if approved.

You can find all the HRM Planning documents for the development agreement to permit the subdivision of PID 40192528 on HRM’s website.

PLANAPP 2023-01496-PID 40192528
<https://www.halifax.ca/business/planning-development/applications/planapp-2023-01496-pid-40192528-musquodoboit-harbour>

Harbour Garden Village has its own website with drawings of the various housing and commercial parts of the plan: <https://harbourgardenvillage.ca>

Coverage of City Hall

By Matt Strickland

The *Cooperator* is getting rural focused City Hall coverage. After he made a presentation to council on Nov 28, 2023 (article published Nov. 30 on thecoast.ca), I pulled editor Richard Bell aside and asked if he’d be interested in my writing for the *Cooperator* too as their city hall guy. I’ve been covering city hall on and off for the better part of five years. I started with the publication I launched myself (r.i.p. *Committee Trawler*) and have since moved to podcasting (*The Grand Parade podcast*) or writing for the Coast.

So, by way of introduction, here’s a preview of this year’s budget deliberations set to take place down at City Hall.

In previous years city budgets have been carbon copies of the previous years’ budget with a few changes around the edges for new initiatives and projects brought to Council by staff or councillors. Frustrated by the slow pace of change, Bedford area Councillor Tim Outhit asked city staff to blow up the city budget process at that Nov. 28 meeting. Outhit’s motion, which was passed by Council, asked staff to come back with a budget that’s municipal priorities first, everything else second.

One of the major issues the HRM faces is one of sustainability. For example, in the Dec 13, 2023, meeting of the Audit and Finance standing committee city, Councillors got a report saying the municipality’s infrastructure is about to start costing the city a lot more than it’s worth.

Another major issue highlighted by the Canadian Urban Institute in a November report about the state of Canadian Cities, shows that Halifax is way too reliant on property taxes as a revenue source. In fiscally healthier cities, property taxes make up about 30% of municipal revenue. In the HRM property taxes make up 72% of the city’s revenue.

Even though it will be extremely unpopular, the city of Halifax needs to become fiscally resilient. And the reason it will be unpopular is because there’s no way for the city to do that without diversifying its revenue sources.

Last time the city tried to do that, by charging for weekend parking, downtown businesses threw a tantrum and told council they believed their business depended on free parking to stay afloat. Even though business owners provided no evidence for their claims, Council backed off raising weekend parking fees.

The good news, for those new to the budget process, is that the city has a relatively new top bureaucrat in Chief Administrative Officer Cathie O’Toole. She updated and modernized the city’s financial processes and was one of the only people to come out of the Peter Kelly scandal smelling of roses. She was Halifax Water’s CFO when they became a fiscally sustainable organization.

The bureaucracy of the city of Halifax, for the first time in a few years, is making real strides into modernizing its municipal governance. And a lot of these strides will start with this year’s budget. It’s an exciting time to be following municipal politics, and this year you’ll be able to follow it in the *Cooperator*.

Solar Electricity for the Prestons

HRM is spending more than \$5 million in 2024 to put solar panels on nine more community centres or municipal sies, including the East Preston Community Centre and the North Preston Community Centre. The city expects these new solar panels to generate about 3 million Kwh of renewable energy annually, at a cost savings of more than \$350,000.

Old No. 7 Restaurant and Sports Bar Fundraiser

The Old No. 7 Restaurant and Sports Bar was the setting for Christmas music Tuesday evening, December 13.

Music was provided by The First United Church Choir and Riversong.

All proceeds were donated to the Food Bank and Soul’s Harbour Rescue Mission.



Ian Dwyer: Remembrance (December 15, 1960 - December 16, 2023)

By Dee Dwyer

My brother Ian Dwyer came to live with me after he had hip surgery in the winter of 2020. He found work at Rosborough Boats and did odd jobs around my property for which I am so grateful. I had the benefit of hearing stories of his time in the Caribbean, his travels elsewhere, and about many of his projects and plans. Now my brothers and sisters and family—as well as his many friends—are reeling after his death by car accident on December 16, 2023, the day after his 63rd birthday.

Ian had an exciting and very social life as a world traveler, draftsman, custom woodworker, storyteller, and yachtsman who could navigate by the stars. He came into the world on a cold day when his father's car wouldn't start, so my parents called Dr. Jardine asking if he would pick up—and deliver.

He grew up on West Petpeswick, where a few of his hockey pucks and golf balls ended up in the inlet. He attended the elementary school in Musquodoboit Harbour, Robert Jamieson, and Eastern Shore District High. As a teenager, he worked at Donnie Rowling's Gas Station, and later at Captain Todd's. He spent summers at the family camp and cottage at Blomidon where he picked strawberries and potatoes, hiked, camped out, and fell out of apple trees. He studied architectural drafting at Halifax Regional Vocational School and was valedictorian graduating in 1985.

Drafting took him to Sint Maarten in the Caribbean, where he soon was sailing. He crewed and later was captain of the Falcon, a catamaran, and at Happy Hour could often be found at Chesterfield's by

the Philipsburg dock. He fell in love with racing, and I remember when I visited him in Sint Maarten in 1990, when he wasn't sailing, how he made a wistful remark when he saw that the wind was picking up. He raced in the Caribbean and elsewhere.

He sailed on many 'cats': *Swaliga*, *Looking for Elvis*, *L'Ondine*, *Prana*, and *Lickety Split*.

Boats also took him to Falmouth, England, and he sailed to Brazil and the Bahamas delivering boats. Later he sailed from Mallorca before he came back to Canada, where he worked at the Chester

Golf Course, Castle Hardware, and more recently at the Binnacle, where he shared his love of sailing and racing with colleagues and customers.

Ian had many interests: in motorbikes, cycling, playing golf, and hiking. He volunteered at the Chester Playhouse,

making props and sets, and even acting.

Ian loved to tell stories about his travels and his sailing adventures, and loved to describe in great detail his woodworking projects and houses he was working on. He had friends all around the world. He was adaptable, living on a boat, or house-sitting a lovely villa with a swimming pool above Oyster Pond on Sint Maarten's. He had many skills, as skipper and captain, as a guide taking folks around Saint Bart's. When I arrived at a restaurant there with Ian, the owner took us aside—to serve us champagne!

Ian would take up a needle and thread to mend a sail or a shirt for anyone. Ian was famously a pirate to his nieces and nephews, especially to Patrick Dwyer, who is still convinced Ian was one, but with a kind heart and a warm smile. And I was reminded recently that more than a few women might have had a crush on Ian.

Plans for a celebration of Ian's life will take place in the spring or summer of 2024.



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