



County of Haliburton

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August 7, 2008

Mr. Gary Schultz
President, Oxtongue Lake Ratepayers Association
C/O Algonquin Lakeside Inn
RR #1
Dwight, Ontario
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Dear Mr. Schultz,

Further to our recent conversations concerning the re-placement of the Oxtongue Narrows Bridge (GWP 93-89-00) and the Oxtongue River Bridge (GWP 5550-04-00) in the Township of Algonquin Highlands within the County of Haliburton.

As the Director of Economic Development, Tourism and Marketing for the County of Haliburton, I concur with the comments provided by MP Barry Devolin, MPP Laurie Scott, the Township of Algonquin Highlands and others.

No one, including your Association the Oxtongue Lake Ratepayers Association, disagrees with the imminent need for bridge replacement. However, concern is very real for the ongoing economic vitality of the tourism businesses in the area. The works contemplated will be ongoing over a number of seasons, dramatically impacting the entire community of Oxtongue Lake as the businesses impacted are family owned and operated. Thus the financial impacts will be felt both corporately and personally.

Essentially, your local business either rely on a transient client, repeat customers or a combination of both. Much has been said about the need for a prior understanding as to financial support for these businesses as they struggle through season after season with little or no cash-flow to sustain either their business or their families. While this may address immediate needs; my concern is broader and includes those businesses with a repeat customer base. Responsible operators will advise their dedicated guests of the untoward circumstances culminating in the guest's logical decision to vacation elsewhere. The transience guest may, by virtue of its nature, be replaced in future years but given today's society and a lack of 'brand allegiance', will those repeat customers comeback?

The reality of this situation encompasses two precipitous circumstances; firstly no matter the client base, little or no meaningful cash flow will exist during the construction process to sustain the tourist based businesses in the area and all businesses in this area are tourist based. Secondly, if these operators are able to survive this economic drought, how will they afford to launch a marketing campaign to attract business?

It is essential, for the financial health and future economic vitality of the Oxtongue Lake area that several concerns be addressed prior to the commencement of the construction process.

Firstly, it must be recognized prior to any construction commencing, that a mutually agreeably mechanism be in place that addresses the very real immediate and long term financial concerns of local businesses and their families during the construction process.

Secondly, that consideration is given to the concerns raised regarding traffics flows during peak tourist seasons to minimize their impact. Hence, two lanes of traffic may very well be essential to ensuring the safe and reasonable flow of traffic entering Algonquin Park, a global tourist attraction.

Thirdly, that plans be undertaken to return the areas of construction and the detour areas to a state compatible with the immediate landscape and minimize negative long lasting visual impacts. This area is known for its rugged landscape and rocky natural terrain.

Fourthly, a program be agreed upon to assist in the marketing and promotion of the area at the conclusion of the construction. This program would be targeted to appeal to the transient traveller and assist in the return of the 'repeat' clients. It could include a direct marketing campaign to an agreed client list and convey 'Welcome Back, we're open for your business'.

Currently, tourism operators within Ontario are facing external economic parameters such as; a strong Canadian dollar; rising travel costs and security issues which have had a negative impact on the industry as a whole. The local operators of the Oxtongue Lake area do not need a local negative issue as well without the security of a pre-arranged agreement to sustain their business and families until it is 'Business as unusual'.

The Oxtongue Lake area is a very unique tourism area within the Haliburton Highlands which has participated in various County of Haliburton tourism marketing promotions. Your operators are survivors that constantly contend with nature's unpredictability, effects of SARS and international issues as business risks. However, having the tranquility of the environment which is your staple product, what you sell, disturbed for a protracted period of time, is in all probability beyond your financial endurance.

I look forward to working with you, your fellow Association members and the Ministry of Transport to attain a mutually satisfactory arrangement for all concerned.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of any further assistance in this matter.

Sincerely,

Robert Smith
Director
Economic Development, Tourism and Marketing

cc: Eleanor Harrison, Warden County of Haliburton & Reeve of Algonquin Highlands
Jim Wilson, Chief Administrative Officer, County of Haliburton