Phragmites group asking for environmental facilitator

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Using the Lambton Shores draft Official Plan mantra, the Lambton Shores Phragmites Community Group (LSPCG) came to council last week to explain how they are “Preserving, protecting and enhancing the amazing natural heritage areas in Lambton Shores” and are requesting an environmental facilitator position be created.

The committee, who recently received honourable mention in the 2013 Minister’s Award for Environmental Excellence explained what they have been doing in the fight to rid Phragmites and how they are becoming broke and burnt-out doing it. “What would happen if LSPCG, with its eight volunteer members, wasn’t doing this work?” spearhead volunteer Nancy Vidler asked council adding she did not mean to sound ungrateful of the continued support from Lambton Shores “but that they have come to a crossroad.”

“This week, we brought the invasive Phragmites issue to Council and to our Conservation Authorities, there was little knowledge of this menace and no management plan. Had there been no action, our coastal areas, wetlands and beaches would have been inundated with tall, dense stands of Phragmites. Native plants and animals would have been crowded out, shoreline views would have been blocked, access for swimming, fishing, hunting and hiking would have been reduced and the build-up of dry plant material would have created additional fire hazards. The impact on tourism would have been devastating and the negative economic effect on the entire municipality would have been substantial,” Vidler said.

She explained that good outcome though, has resulted in volunteer fatigue.

“How long before the enthusiasm wanes?” she asked adding there are also concerns that surrounding personal liability, as they rely on personal insurance, the costs as the “time, expenses, office supplies, printing, telephone calls, mileage, attending conferences, etc., are all on volunteer’s own dine” mounts.

Last year this committee eradicated Phragmites and continue to do so in Port Franks, Grand Bend, Lake Valley Grove/Sunnidale, and municipal roadsides and property. Through an outreach education program they are working with the Conservation Authorities, media, NextEraEnergy, Ontario Ministries of Environment and Agriculture, all tiers of government, local agencies and working groups.

On-the-ground work with the Lambton Shores Phragmites Community Group includes volunteers certified by MOE in herbicide application, with knowledge of environmental protection practices, evaluating an application and monitoring the results. They have raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for their projects in local, provincial and federal agreements and support.

But, their sustainability concerns prompted this meeting with council as they believe, “It is now time to consider the recommendation to council last week to create that position such as the recognition of our work.” Vidler.

“The Facilitator of Environmental Programs could track activities, liaise with neighbouring municipalities, Lambton County, Provincial, Federal Government, Pinery Provincial Park, First Nations, program and Alternative Land Use Services. She listed various ways to fund this position including government granting and local foundations.

Councillor received the presentation with thanks for all the work they have accomplished.
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But, their sustainability concerns prompted this meeting with council as they believe, "It is now time to consider the recommendation made in Dr. Janice Gilbert's Long Range Phragmites Management Plan, created for and adopted by the previous council, that a municipal staff position be created to augment their efforts."

"A Facilitator of Environmental Programs could track activities, liaise with environmental advocacy groups to ensure continuity of efforts and effective sharing of resources, seek out funding support and prepare reports, assist in developing and implementing educational programs, engage the local community," suggested Vidler.

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