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To: mmra@sympatico.ca

Subject: Communiqué: the MMRA's e-letter. Vol 2.1 (Sep 2007)

Hello again to all our readers. I trust you have had a restful and relaxed summer so far! This edition of The Communiqué begins the second year of the MMRA's monthly e-letter, having taken July and August off. I'd like to welcome our many new subscribers to this e-letter and hope you will find it somewhat informative and engaging.

As always, Mississippi Mills has been a busy place, with its many summer festivals and events. Busy too have been the staff and councillors of our town as well as the MMRA Board. Ideas and issues which have been foremost on our minds are presented briefly below.

Governance: What kind of government do the residents of Mississippi Mills deserve? In our 4 year history, starting with a focus on planning and development, the MMRA has been attentive to concerns that rate-payers and residents have raised. We continue to inquire into Council's approach to improvements in strategy, plans and processes at Town Hall. But, frankly, it's something of a black-hole.

- I have heard that there are now about 80 staff on the Town's payroll! Seems a bit overweight to me, for a town of only 12,000 people. Council seemingly approves additional staffing in a relatively ad hoc manner. Three or four part time positions have recently been approved. The town's debt is growing.
- Town communications with stakeholders seems to be poor. The Town website, flyers and newspapers are used, but is that enough? Good initiatives exist and many staff work hard to accomplish tasks, but effectiveness of communication falls short. For example, the annual "Mississippi Mills at a Glance" (Sep 6) is a hugely successful gathering of about 35 service and cultural groups. Unfortunately only a few Mississippi Mills residents seem to be aware of - or take part in - this long-running event. Other examples include this summer's Pesticides baseline survey and the Policing Survey. What responsibility should we, as citizens, take to stay informed?
- Council's connections with community groups like the MMRA seems very conditional. The Board of the MMRA as well as many other individuals and groups in MM spend hours drafting up and submitting input for topics on committee and council meeting agendas. We don't want credit, but we'd like some feedback. We've recently sent in submissions on the Spring Street and Sadler Estates developments as well as recommending a review of the Planning Department. We receive no response to specific items.

The MMRA Board would like to help to improve communications between the Town and our residents. But we need your help on the following initiative:

- Volunteer Observers: Can you attend the occasional meeting of one of the Standing Committees, such as Finance and Administration, Planning, Roads and Public Works, etc? Give us your notes and observations about the meeting. (We'll supply you with an observation summary.) We'll distribute information through our channels: E.g. through the MMRA Yahoo Discussion Group, our website or this monthly e-letter. This process not only helps improve the connection, but also assists councillors and staff to get wider community input on a timelier basis. Please contact me if you can offer a small amount of time.

Urban Cowboys: These are halcyon days for the developers, particularly the residential types in Almonte. By my estimation there's at least 1353 units coming on stream and an expected population increase (x 2.5 per unit) of 3382 over the next few years. Remember there are only about 4400 souls in Almonte now!

Spring Street: Houchaimi:	479 units (as at June 2007 – in final approval stage)
Sadler: Basille's "behind-the-mall":	541 units (as at June 2007 – at draft approval stage)
Ann St Subdivision, Nimer/Cinnamon	110 units (est – Town to chip in with infrastructure \$)
White Tail Ridge, Connelley	173 units (est – ready to start digging)
Logan's Run	50 units (est)

So a special levy of \$15,000 per proposed unit, payable before shovels dig, should help to offset the \$20 million for the sewage treatment plant! Unfortunately it doesn't seem to work like that. "Current residents please check your wallets!"

Commercial development is also continuing to scar up the face of Almonte as the developers continue to build empty malls, with parking lots that squeeze on to the Town's Ottawa Street access. Some may see this as economic development – I see it as "developer economics:" it's accountable to no-one and no-one is accountable for it. Pretty soon we'll have a roundabout to distract visitors from this blemish. Meanwhile, a valiant cadre of focused business people at the Chamber of Commerce seem to be trying to get Council to re-think the politics of ineffectualism and put economic development back at the core of our urban areas. See

<http://maapdowntowns.vox.com/>

Rural Mississippi Mills: Significant things continue to happen in our rural areas that perhaps don't draw the attention that's merited. Pakenham, for example, is the 176th "town" in Ontario that has started a process to de-amalgamate. Potential impacts on Almonte and Ramsay residents are huge. On the agri-food front, the MMRA and the Lanark Landowners Association (LLA) have sought common ground. For instance the LLA continue to actively support the area's agricultural producers through their showcasing of farm products. Their huge farmers market in July was considered a success by those that attended. This will be followed up by another such farmers market later this month.

- The Landowners' Harvest Market, Beckwith: Sept 30. The

The MMRA with the support of LLA President Bill Duncan (who is also a member of the MMRA Board) will be focusing on some of the myths and realities surrounding the current food supply debate. Please look for our upcoming information session, likely in February 2008, on this topic.

Environment: This, in my humble opinion, is not a serious governance priority in Mississippi Mills: other levels of government are viewed as exclusive drivers of environmental priorities and MM has become a laggard. The pesticides issue, for example, is rolling along at a glacial pace. A baselining survey was sent out in the middle of summer along with the mid summer flyers. Did you see it? Frankly, I missed it. Nevertheless the Town can claim some glory in supporting Ottawa River Power Corp's "Great Refrigerator Roundup". See the Town's website at <http://www.mississippimill.com/townhall/news.cfm?newsid=463§ionId=37>

MMRA members and others continue to think globally and focus locally: one member asked why a community the size of urban Almonte, with no less than 4 schools, could not implement a "walking bus" program (<http://www.walkingbus.com/>) to reduce school bus traffic and increase exercise among our kids. We asked the schools, but heard from none. But climate change is gaining local interest:

- The Mississippi Valley Field Naturalists (MVFN) and Mississippi Valley Conservation (MVC) with sponsorship through NRCAN, will be hosting two climate change workshops Sept 15 and Sep 22 in Almonte. If interested, please see <http://www.mvfn.ca/Climate%20Change%20Workshop.pdf>

On the issue of protecting our River, the MMRA will sponsor a 3-way discussion on Oct 12 by John Kittle (concerned residents of North Frontenac), George White (Frontenac Ventures Corporation) and Paul Lehman (MVC) about the facts and fiction around uranium mining on the Mississippi watershed.

- Friday, October 12, 7:30 pm, Almonte United Church Social Hall: Topic: Nuclear River or Bad Science? What you need to know about uranium mining on the Mississippi watershed.
- A reader advises that Dr. Ann Dale, formerly at the National Round Table on the Environment and Economy has moved on to focus on sustainable community research through Community Research Connections. Take the survey at <http://www.crcresearch.org/survey.htm>

Policing: The Town has launched a policing survey. The survey closes end of day Monday (Sep 10). Since many of our members have concerns about policing, I beg your forgiveness in attaching a copy! Please complete and return to DSmithson@mississippimills.ca. Speaking about policing, one reader pointed out that Gibson, B.C. - a Town about the size of our Almonte ward, with very well-kept public spaces, naturalized and cultivated areas, artwork and ornaments - promotes a volunteer community policing program as an innovative tool for community involvement. Something for Council and our Police Services Board to consider perhaps?

Footnotes:

- Congratulations to Ron Barter on the re-born Rosewood Studios in downtown Almonte. Visit <http://www.rosewoodstudio.com/>
- Also, special mention and congratulation to the Almonte Soccer Club, which recently celebrated 40 years of supporting soccer programs in the area!
- Attend Appleton's Teddy Bear Picnic, on Sunday September 16 at noon.
- And oh, yeah, the Oct 10 Provincial Election and referendum on electoral reform <http://www.yourbigdecision.ca>
- Website Working Group: The MMRA Board is seeking volunteer assistance to help upgrade our web presence. Please contact me if you can join us.
- Community Emergency Response Volunteer (CERV) Program: Here's something readers may wish to consider signing up for. The CERV program supplements municipal emergency plans. Cindy Halcrow, Town Clerk, (chalcrow@mississippimills.ca) has been working hard to recruit and train teams of volunteers. Two

teams are already in place. Another 20 volunteers are needed, particularly from the Appleton and Pakenham ends of the Town. So if you can help, contact Cindy.

Your comments are, as always, most welcome in this dialogue about Mississippi Mills.

Best wishes.

Arnie Francis
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Mississippi Mills Residents' Association (MMRA)
"Striving to promote a shared vision for Mississippi Mills"
www.mmra.ca

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