



MMRA *watchdog*

The Watchdog is the newsletter of the Mississippi Mills Residents' Association Vol.1, Iss.2 Spring 2003

The MMRA annual general meeting (AGM) will be held on May 22nd at the Legion Hall, in Almonte, at 7:30 PM.

The purpose of the AGM is to elect a permanent Board of Directors (one year term), to discuss current issues, and for volunteers to join committees. The MMRA includes residents in Ramsay, Pakenham, and Almonte. Let us hear from you!

Also, this is a good time to declare your intention to run for council in the fall.

An informative position paper concerning the proposed Ottawa St. strip mall was produced & presented to the Planning & Development Committee, April 17th by MMRA directors, and will be reviewed by Council.

Members can read this paper and other significant documents at www.mmra.ca

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This Can't be What They Mean by "Smart Growth"

Your Mississippi Mills Residents' Association (MMRA) recently took steps to put the rapid residential expansion of Almonte on hold. We feel we need better development choices than those currently proposed.

As you all know, Town Council approved the 170-house Whitetail Ridge (WTR) development against massive public opposition. Next in the queue is the proposed Spring Street subdivision with its 300 houses and condos. Those two developments alone mean 30% growth for the town.

Developments outside of Almonte ward cannot go forward unless the Almonte Official Plan (OP) is amended to allow water and sewage lines to extend into Ramsay. The MMRA sent a letter to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) objecting to the amendment. The MMAH has the authority to reject or postpone the OP amendment. Our argument covered the following points:

The amendment is premature. Two years ago, the Town created a committee to gather public opinion and make recommendations for a new Community Official Plan. That committee is in its final stage of work. The MMRA feels all major residential developments should be put on hold until the recommendations are tabled.

The amendment is not needed. The MMRA used the Town's own data to prove that Almonte can grow at a healthy rate without moving into Ramsay. There are 630 potential lots in Almonte. About 300 should be available in the next few years—75 lots available today. In 2001, there were 12 housing starts in Almonte ward, with 26 more in 2002. At that rate, 300 lots are enough to meet growth demands for a decade or more, at which point the remainder of the 630 lots will be considered for development.

The amendment is not risk-free. The MMRA has doubts about the Almonte sewage lagoon's ability to handle the extra waste of the hundreds of proposed new homes. The last major study of the lagoon's structural integrity was done in the late 70s or early 80s. Not much is known about it.

We do know the sewage lagoon sits in the drinking water capture zone of one of Almonte's wells. A well protection study delivered by consultants in November 2002 says the lagoon is a potential source of contamination for the well. It recommends the integrity of the lagoon's clay liners be investigated. We affirm no major developments should go ahead until reliable sewage treatment and water quality is verified.

The amendment is ill advised and gives Council and developers no guidance regarding permissible extensions to services. The current wording promotes leapfrog or checkerboard development.

The MMRA has made a strong case to the MMAH, but politics may win over policy. You can help the MMRA by emailing key provincial politicians. Tell them Mississippi Mills wants smart growth & safe drinking water. Ask them to reject or postpone the amendment, at least until the new official plan is ready.

Premier Ernie Eves:

ernie_eves@ontla.ola.org

Environment Minister Chris Stockwell:

chris_stockwell@ontla.ola.org

Municipal Affairs Minister David Young:

david_young@ontla.ola.org

Lanark MPP Norm Sterling:

norm_sterlingco@ontla.ola.org

—submitted by Shaun McLaughlin

MMRA NEEDS YOUR HELP

Please consider getting involved – we really need you!

The **Current Development Action Committee (CDAC)** has been established with a mandate to respond quickly to development issues needing immediate attention. Contact Shaun McLaughlin at smclaugh@magma.ca or 256-9834.

A **General Policy Advisory Committee** is being established to look at the long-term vision for Mississippi Mills. Dorothy Finner is heading up this group (d.finner@sympatico.ca or 256-1540).

In order to create a strong foundation for the MMRA, a **Legal and Structural Advisory Committee** is being established. Al Potvin is heading up this group (barbara.potvin@sympatico.ca or 256-2602).

A **Waste Management** committee will be formed to monitor all aspects from sewage, waste diversion, landfill issues, to Plasma Arc Incineration. Contact George Yaremchuk for further information at gny@sympatico.ca or 256-5837.

As a member of the MMRA, we are appealing to you to get involved in the above committees or in any other capacity that you might be able to contribute.

We also need **watchdogs** (members) to attend town council and council committee meetings, and then email a short report of any important issues that came up or were voted on. Attendance can be occasional or consistent; it's up to you and your schedule. Contact Anne Mason if you are interested at annepan@superaje.com or 256-9098. We need to get information out to the community. Can you help?

—submitted by George Yaremchuk

A hidden tax increase this year?

Hidden because Council proposes to keep the municipal property tax *rate* at the same level as last year, but, because your property assessment rose significantly this year, municipal property taxes will increase proportionately.

The *average* assessment value for residential and farm property went up 10.5% (12% in Ramsay, 7% in Almonte, Pakenham 10%). About 1.4% is due to new construction and development, so individual residential/farm property assessments went up by around 9.1%. The municipal tax that you pay is a multiplication of the **tax rate times your property assessment value**. So if the tax rate stays the same (*i.e. zero percent tax rate increase*, says Council), but the assessment goes up as it has, then **the municipal portion of your taxes will go up by the same percentage as your assessment**.

A 9.1% increase in individual municipal taxes is hardly justified when the inflation rate is 2%.

Your actual municipal tax increase depends on how much your own property assessment has gone up – average assessment increases differ by ward. Some individual assessments are much higher than 9.1% (some near 20%) while some are lower.

The municipal taxes are a portion of your property tax bill. There are also school and county portions, as well as a garbage collection surcharge and, in Almonte Ward, a separate charge for water and sewage services. Your total bill will depend on what tax rates are set by the school boards and the County. The latest information states that school board taxes will not increase, and that county taxes will increase about 4% (in actual tax dollars you have to pay).

Let your Councillors know that you do not want to see a significant increase in your taxes.

The Desired Alternative:

Council should **decrease the tax rate**, so that the actual municipal taxes you pay match last year's amount plus the inflation rate (less than 2%). What follows is the **tax history** of municipal tax increases for the last few years (stated in % of actual tax dollars you pay).

3.75 %	1.12 %	5.78%	5.39%	9.1% (proposed)
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During the term of the current council, municipal taxes will have increased by over 20%.

CALL YOUR COUNCILLORS. This is probably the most important thing to do. Start with the head of the Finance and Administration Committee, Garry Dalgity, and then the Mayor. 256-2064

SHOW UP AT THE COUNCIL MEETINGS. The next Finance Committee meeting is Tuesday May 6th. There will be a special budget meeting sometime before this. The meeting agendas are available at: http://www.town.mississippi-mills.on.ca/localgovt/Council_Agenda.asp A show of force may be enough to sway some votes. After all, this is an election year!

—submitted by George Yaremchuk

MMRA Questionnaire Results from Feb. 12 2003 Meeting

Issue	Very concerned	Somewhat concerned	Not concerned	Need more information
Funding of Seniors' Facilities	31%	49%	11%	9%
Local Health Care	59%	32%	6%	3%
Group Homes	15%	38%	38%	9%
Strip Development along highway corridors	52%	37%	11%	
Development on Agricultural Lands	57%	37%	3%	3%
Preservation of Agricultural Economy	60%	29%	6%	5%
Residential Growth Planning	82%	18%		
Business/Industrial Growth Planning	69%	31%		
Future of Almonte Downtown Core	86%	11%	3%	
Maintaining Hamlet Character	64%	18%	18%	
Increasing Municipal Taxes and Fees	38%	38%	24%	
Arts & Cultural Centre	24%	59%	12%	5%
All-Candidates' meetings for local elections	51%	40%	6%	3%
Water quality & well-head protection	51%	40%	9%	
Waste management (dumps, incineration, sewage)	62%	32%	3%	3%

Developer accepts MMRA invitation to meet with group

The MMRA interim directors hosted a meeting with John Levi (one of two partners in the Ottawa Street mall development proposal). Levi presented plans to board members of the MMRA, the UAC (Urban Advisory Committee), and the RAC (Rural Advisory Committee).

Levi hopes to begin construction for a 45,000 square foot mall as soon as he gets final approvals, meets policy conditions, and prepares his site plan. The go-ahead from the town hinges on amendments being approved to both the Ramsay and Almonte Official Plans. In addition to the mall building, Levi is planning to construct a Home Hardware store and later a lumber yard. Tim Horton's is finalizing plans for an outlet on an adjacent property.



Bring back this design? People's Store, Almonte, early 1900s.
Photo courtesy of M. Dunn, more at <http://almonte.clal.ca/>

Levi agreed to some suggestions made by those at the meeting for minor design changes to the façade and parking lot, which would improve the presentation of the mall. He was asked to consider residential

apartments above some of the stores, and his response was positive. However, it seems that town planner, Forbes Symon, indicated he does not favour a residential component to the mall, even though rental accommodation is in short supply in our area.

Concern about safe access, not only for vehicles, but particularly for people walking or biking to the mall, was an issue raised by the group. Sidewalks along the road in front of the mall are essential. Levi suggested that it was Council's responsibility to provide a sidewalk since the roadway and sidewalks fall under the jurisdiction of the municipality. A pedestrian crosswalk across the highway linking the two malls was discussed as well as a sidewalk along the front perimeter of the mall itself.

As a member of the MMRA himself, John Levi has given his assurance he is committed to making the mall a positive contribution to the community. He has also agreed that, where possible, he will consider minor modifications to his plans and further input from the community. Levi has invited input from the MMRA to assist in the landscaping design of the proposed mall to ensure that it is environmentally appropriate. Do you have concerns or suggestions of your own? Please contact an MMRA director and/or John Levi. —submitted by Anne Mason

And here's something to make your tail wag...

The Town has posted minutes from many of their 2003 committees of council meetings on the town web site. Go to: <http://www.town.mississippi-mills.on.ca/localgovt/committees.asp> The "main" committees, such as Planning and Economic Development, are represented. The MMRA finds this very encouraging, and applauds the town for their initiative! Hopefully, previous years' minutes and minutes from the "lesser" committees will follow shortly.

For an alternative route, go to: www.town.mississippi-mills.on.ca, and place your cursor over the "local government" title (on the left side) A sub-menu will pop up. Select *Committees*.

What's happening at White Tail Ridge?

In February, Council approved developer Mr. Connelly's request to increase the number of units for WTR from 60 to 180. However, before the development can proceed, the County must approve the *draft plan* for the changed design of the subdivision. County will not grant this approval until at least the Almonte Official Plan, and possibly the Ramsay Official Plan, have been amended. Neither the Almonte nor the Ramsay Official plans allow for connecting services between the two wards. Mr. Connelly's proposed changes for the WTR subdivision are predicated on this servicing link. At the moment, these decisions are being made in Kingston at the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, and of course, government decisions take time. (See letter on page one of this newsletter for the MMRA's position on the proposed amendment.)

There is another hitch as well. At the moment, we in Mississippi Mills are in the process of creating a new official plan for the amalgamated region. Many residents believe that planning and servicing decisions with far-reaching consequences for the future of **all wards** of Mississippi Mills should be made in a prudent, co-ordinated and strategic fashion. The rush to extend services 2 km to WTR is simply premature.

Finally, such issues are hot in many other municipalities as well. The City Council in Ottawa is adamant about not increasing existing services to Stittsville, where developers salivate over large tracts of land. The Ottawa City planning committee recently passed a new official plan that calls for a strict urban boundary around the city to limit development to areas where roads, sewers, water, and transit already exist. The City of Ottawa recognizes that a *leapfrog* or *checkerboard* type of development is too expensive in the long run. Governor General Adrienne Clarkson, together with her husband, will be focussing the last 1½ years of her appointment on the issues of smart development in Canadian communities.

Despite this groundswell, our current Council approves of WTR. If the submitted OP amendment is approved at the provincial level, WTR-type developments may occur anywhere within Mississippi Mills. Submissions of opinion from individual residents to the current Council are pointless. Concerned citizens are encouraged to contact the public servants listed on page one of this newsletter. Stress water quality and smart growth, reiterate and summarize the main points, and remind them that a majority of residents do not favour WTR and similar bad planning in Mississippi Mills.

—submitted by Stewart Yeaman

— dog tag —

MMRA—The Mississippi Mills Residents' Association
The Watchdog is the newsletter of the MMRA. The Watchdog broadcasts information & decisions from the Board of the MMRA, and keeps members up-to-date on current issues and municipal affairs in Mississippi Mills. (Published as required.)



Our bark is no worse than our bite.

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Mississippi Mills Residents' Association—MMRA

2003—Membership Registration Form—also available on-line at www.mmra.ca

The MMRA is a non-profit residents' association. To join by mail: MMRA 2 Tatra St. Almonte ON K0A 1A0

Your membership donation will help cover the costs of organising meetings, advertising & communications.

Please join the MMRA to help protect & enhance our wonderful community of Mississippi Mills.

last name(s): _____
 mailing address: _____
 street address: _____
 town: _____
 postal code: _____
 email address: _____
 residence:
 Blakeney Almonte Clayton Appleton Ramsay Rural Pakenham Pakenham Rural

first name(s): _____
 home phone number: _____
 membership fee
 individual: \$10
 family (2 members): \$15
 donations are appreciated: \$ _____
 TOTAL: \$ _____

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