

Comments on the Town of Woodstock Draft Municipal Plan May 26, 2008

Meduxnekeag River Association

The Meduxnekeag River Association has reviewed the Town of Woodstock's draft Municipal Plan and after careful consideration wishes to suggest some changes to Council. Based in Woodstock, the Meduxnekeag River Association generally is concerned with issues related to the Meduxnekeag watershed. Portions of the Town of Woodstock are within the Meduxnekeag watershed, with the remainder of the Town either impacting, or being impacted by, the watershed.

Our intention in this process is to identify issues and concerns, and where possible provide possible solutions or improvements. We see ourselves as a collaborator with the Town to remedy some of these issues (and we will commit to assisting where possible.)

Going through the Plan section by section:

2.1 Goal

To promote a pattern of growth and land use which will encourage orderly, efficient and equitable development.

We suggest including "responsible" development.

2.3.2 Non-conforming uses

2) It shall be a policy of Council to encourage the relocation of non-conforming uses to appropriately designated and planned sites.

We support this, especially as it pertains to riparian uses. Is "encourage" limited to moral suasion or is it envisioned to include land trades, tax incentives or disincentives and other tangible measures? What is the process by which this happens?

7.0 Recreation

The "lands for public purposes" reserved in the subdivision plan bylaw will be of far more value both recreationally and environmentally if they are planned to be connected by, or to, the existing and proposed trail system.

7.3 Policies

3) It shall be the intention of Council to undertake a Recreation Needs Assessment study to identify facilities, which are beneficial to Town residents and also marketable to the wider Carleton County.

We support a recreation needs assessment, but suggest that it go further, identifying not only facilities, but also other recreational assets: the Meduxnekeag river as a canoe and kayak stream; the Meduxnekeag Valley Nature Preserves, for example.

4) It shall be the intention of Council to develop a trail network, which connects points of interest

throughout the Town.

We support the development of additional walking trails, including the upgrading of the existing trail system along the intervale, thus providing a better connection to the Sentier NB Trail system and the Meduxnekeag Valley Nature Preserves. The Association has made a commitment to explore the possibility of a boardwalk along the marsh/intervale, creating an “area of interest” in close proximity to the downtown and linked with existing/new trails. We also note that “walking” is NOT “passive” as described in this section. And that loops are crucial to effective promotion and use of trail systems. We strongly recommend that maintenance of trails, once they are established, should become a regular and ongoing annual municipal budget item in the same way that sidewalks and streets are.

8.0 Environment

8.3 Policies

1) Given the low elevations and their importance to the natural environment, lands along the Meduxnekeag and Saint John River systems and associated islands within these rivers surrounding and islands within should be excluded from all forms of habitable development. A ‘Restricted Area’ designation has been added to the Generalized Future Land Use Map to assist in protecting these lands. These lands should also be zoned as ‘Open Space’ on the Zoning Map. In undeveloped areas this zone would also extend 30m back from the edge of the watercourse, to be inline with Provincial setback regulations. Given that portions of this area are already developed, Council should try to enforce this setback whenever possible for new developments. It shall be the intention of Council to designate all undeveloped lands and islands of the Meduxnekeag and Saint John Rivers as Restricted Area on the Generalized Future Land Use Map and zone them as Open Space on the Zoning Map.

We recommend replacing “*Council should try to enforce this setback whenever possible...*” with “*Council will enforce this setback*”.

We support the inclusion of additional buffer requirements on watercourses, thereby providing more effective protection for water quality and creating a wider corridor for the movement of wildlife species – this is particularly important in a changing climate as these vegetated corridors offer the only opportunity of movement for plant and animal species. Creating a 75m “no development” setback in addition to the 30m buffer would be advisable - this is similar to the protection that is afforded provincially designated watershed and well field protection zones.

5) Council shall endeavor to secure land within environmentally sensitive areas:

- (a) through appropriate zoning mechanisms;*
- (b) as a condition of approval for development agreements and;*
- (c) through land acquisitions, where appropriate.*

An additional option available to the Town for protection of environmentally sensitive areas is a conservation easement. The Plan should specifically provide permanent protection of the Town-owned forest property adjacent to the Bull Road subdivision which is currently protected through a five-year agreement with the Nature Trust of New Brunswick. Affording this ecologically-rich environmentally-sensitive hardwood forest permanent protection would be both a tangible

contribution and an important signal of the Town's seriousness of intent.

On the "Future land use map", the buffer on Connell Brook does not go far enough upstream. Protection for this riparian area provides a potential walking trail corridor joining the Meduxnekeag trails with the Upper Woodstock heritage and protected forest property.

9.0 Rural

Lands designated as Rural have development limited to agricultural uses, stables, single-family dwellings, pits and quarries and recreational uses. These lands act as Woodstock's land bank for future development, therefore Council may redesignate and rezone portions of this land to allow development to proceed as desired by Council.

9.2 Objectives

- 1) To protect and preserve lands currently being used for agricultural uses.*
- 2) To minimize impacts between rural and urban uses.*
- 3) To permit exploitation of granular resources under controlled conditions which minimizes impacts on urban uses and the natural environment.*
- 4) To preserve lands for future development.*

9.3 Policies

- 1) In areas designated Rural on the Future Land Use Map, it shall be a policy of Council to permit agricultural uses, single-family dwellings, pits and quarries and recreational development through the establishment of the Rural or Greenbelt zone.*
- 2) It shall be the intention of Council to consider re-designating and rezoning lands from Rural to other zones to permit development where it is deemed appropriate by Council and where Municipal services can support it.*

We are concerned with the general tone of the "rural" section which appears to equate "rural" and "Greenbelt", and to consider land so designated only as a land bank for future urban development. The first stated objective is to "protect and preserve lands currently being used for agricultural uses", yet this appears to directly conflict with the fourth objective to "preserve lands for future development". If this is the intention, then the policies should directly reflect this, and just this. The intention should be to protect these land uses indefinitely, as they are part of the character of the Town. Land conversion, which is what we are talking about, negatively impacts environmental and recreational values.

We do not support the development of additional gravel pits/quarries in the region, with the possible caveat that all new gravel / quarries should be required to prepare a site restoration plan before work can begin, and to carry out the restoration plan once the operation ceases: this should be "wobble-proof" so that restoration is actually carried out and the site is never left as an eyesore and ecological dead zone.

10.3.2 Pedestrian and Non-motorized transportation

- 1) It shall be the intention of Council to provide improvements to existing pedestrian and non-motorized facilities through the capital works program.*
- 2) It shall be the intention of Council to promote opportunities to link points of interest within the*

Town with appropriately designed multi-use trail system.

Planning should include a bicycle lane on roadways where use and space justify it. This can be viewed as part of the trail system, providing critical links within the system to link “areas of interest”. It is, moreover, an infrastructure contribution towards reducing greenhouse gas emissions. It should include suitable bicycle storage facilities at destinations throughout the Town to encourage bicycle use. Maintaining suitable standards for these cycling routes could also make Woodstock a destination for cyclists along the St. John River Valley and connect it with other initiatives in the region.

11.0 Municipal Infrastructure and Utilities

11.3.2 Sanitary Sewer Collection and Treatment

1) It shall be the intention of Council to continue the program of separating combined storm and sanitary sewer systems within the Town.

2) Upon completion of the snow disposal report, it shall be the intention of Council to manage snow disposal and monitor the effects of snow storage facilities on adjacent land uses. In selecting a site for a future snow storage and disposal facility Council shall have regard for:

- impacts on existing land uses in the area*
- the impact of truck traffic on local streets;*
- the control of drainage from the site and environmental protection; and*
- any required monitoring of the site that may be deemed necessary by the New Brunswick Department of Environment.*

3) It shall be the intention of Council to protect the water quality in water courses that receive storm water runoff from storm sewer outfalls or from private developments through the use of appropriate techniques such as retention and detention ponds, and grassed swales and that the increase in runoff resulting from development is minimized.

We commend the Town on its initiative to separate sanitary and storm sewer systems – this is a good first step. In the planning – and increasingly the practice – of many municipalities, there is an expectation that storm water receive primary treatment prior to outfall into watercourses. We recommend that Woodstock’s plan include a timetable for development and implementation of primary treatment to the storm sewer water before it is released into a watercourse.

We have lobbied for the removal of the snow dump for some years now and are anxiously awaiting the relocation of the snow dump from the NBCC parking lot on the Meduxnekeag River and the old sewage lagoon on the St. John River to an “inland” location(s) where the accumulated environmental hazards in the snow are not washed into watercourses.

It should be noted that once the old sewage lagoon is no longer used as a snow dump, it has the potential to become a visitor asset through conversion to a public garden readily linked by walking trail from the downtown. This would not require construction in this riparian area. The garden might focus on native plant species.

Rather than “... *the increase in runoff resulting from development is minimized*”, we believe the Town should expect “no increase” in runoff from developments.

11.3.6 Solid Waste

1) It shall be a policy of Council to ensure adequate representation on the Valley Solid Waste Commission to represent the views of the Town and ensure adequate service is maintained.

2) It shall be a policy of Council to support the Valley Solid Waste Commission with regards to waste reduction and diversion initiatives.

We do not feel this goes far enough, and would like to see the Town take an active leadership role in enhancing recycling – the current system does not maximize waste diversion from the landfill and it is incumbent on the Town in partnership with the Solid Waste Commission and others to address this issue, such that the Town of Woodstock recycling program achieves acceptable diversion rates. This is not only a municipal issue, but also an environmental and economic issue, that can realize benefits for both the community as a whole and its residents.

In related issues, although not directly linked to the municipal plan, we feel that a “green” purchasing policy would support infrastructure development throughout town. We believe it is important that communities choose the "greenest" options for development and operational needs, and we would offer to assist in the development of this policy if the Town thinks that would be useful.

And, as you are likely aware, the New Brunswick Department of the Environment is promoting a “Conservation Design for Subdivisions” concept as a standard for responsible subdivision development. We feel it is important that Woodstock, as New Brunswick’s 1st Town, help lead the way in implementing sustainable design in sub-division development and that this be reflected in the Municipal Plan.