

# LOCAL/OPINION

*The Review*

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## Town, residents need to get to work

Reading FoTenn consulting firm's conceptual report about what could be in Hawkesbury is a refreshing change. The \$50,000 study into the socio-economic benefits of cleaning up the CIP wet and dry lagoons introduces notions to Hawkesbury which are long overdue. We're talking public riverfront access, a marina, estate residential properties and a mix of housing types, recreational trails, tourists, boaters, recreational green space, development that is socially, economically and environmentally sustainable, streets that integrate into the existing network, the promotion of arts and culture, an environment in which businesses can flourish and local residents and tourists will come to shop, dine, stroll, attend local events and "meet on the street" for casual, social interaction.

Sounds like the good life, doesn't it? The good life may be within our grasp, but we'll need a long reach to get there: 30 years, in fact. That is the amount of time the consultants estimate it will take to remediate and redevelop the 450 acres which comprise the wet and dry paper sludge, construction waste and other debris in the "wet lagoon" and "dry lagoon" sites left behind by the Canadian International Paper Company, which closed in the mid 1980s. For about 25 years, that entire portion of the town's waterfront has been immobilized and, therefore, unsuitable for development.

The key to remediation will be the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) cleaning up the 40-acre wet lagoon site it owns – a first step along the way to cleaning up the remainder of the site, which is currently owned by two private stakeholders. After the MNR cleans up its property, it wants the Town of Hawkesbury to take over, thereby controlling land use and future development.

Much of the development conceptualized in the FoTenn report revolves around the construction of a hotel, a marina and retail and commercial space. While the optimism and possibilities shine through in this report, it also points out constraints. A "significant" amount of marketing would be required to create a new image/vision of Hawkesbury. There are high costs of remediation for both the public and private lands.

If higher-end residents move to the newly-developed area, businesses which locate here to service these residents will have to broaden their markets in order to survive. The total retail demand generated by the residential development will not be cap-

tured entirely by businesses within Hawkesbury. On the other hand, new retail outlets may reduce the amount of retail "leakage" from Hawkesbury. While a new hotel and marina are considered focal points of redevelopment, the study also points out that there is currently an oversupply of hotel rooms and meeting space in Hawkesbury.

But overall, unless remediation takes place, growth in Hawkesbury will be limited due to the tight land supply, according to the report.

The report also goes into considerable detail about the current market and income conditions in Hawkesbury. The average individual income in Hawkesbury is 32.5 per cent lower than Ontario's average. The average household income in Hawkesbury is 45.8 per cent lower than in the rest of Ontario. Hawkesbury residents have a significantly lower level of education compared to Ontario as a whole. Hawkesbury has a lower participation rate, lower employment rate and higher unemployment rates than Ontario. In other words, there is a lot of room for improvement as far as education, training and employment are concerned; improvements could lead to increased retail expenditures per capita, which are currently lower on average in the Hawkesbury area than in the rest of Ontario.

The FoTenn report talks about the possibilities for a 450-acre parcel of land which has been frozen in time for 25 years. If this report does nothing else, it should illuminate the fact that there are miles of additional waterfront being ignored. There is a world of possibilities for this historic waterfront town located on what is soon to be named one of Canada's heritage rivers.

As Eastern Ontario's largest population and economic centre, Hawkesbury should lead the way by giving area residents as much information as it can about what needs to be done. It could start by posting FoTenn's report online and allowing comments past the January 10 deadline, which is tomorrow. Hawkesbury's municipal and business leaders must look at the big picture when it comes to Hawkesbury's future. Commuter transit, a new image, a focus on heritage and outstanding customer service should be part of an immediate plan to turn this town around.

It's time for everyone to put an oar in the water. L.S.

Note: The FoTenn report is available on The Review's website, or visit our offices to obtain a paper copy.