



NEWS LOCAL

Marine manager defends proposed harbour expansion

By Valerie MacDonald, Northumberland TODAY
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Cobourg Marina Manager Paul Gauthier counters a citizens group's claims that there is not a business case supporting expansion of the marina into Cobourg's west harbour area. There is also a waiting list of people wanting slips, he says. VALERIE MACDONALD/Northumberland Today

COBOURG - While a grassroots citizens group commences its door-to-door campaign to convince town councillors to leave the west harbour area of Cobourg undeveloped, marina manager Paul Gauthier tells Northumberland Today why an expansion is needed.

The original mandate for developing the harbour marina was as a "means of economic stimulation for the town" and it was to be a "self-funding" facility, Gauthier said in an interview Tuesday afternoon after the morning media conference held by the citizens' advocacy group, Preserve Our Heritage Harbour.

In light of this mandate, "staff felt" the marina had to be expanded and the latest proposal, though not final nor adopted by council, recommends adding 116 slips to do that, Gauthier said.

User fees do meet operating costs but some infrastructure, primarily existing docks, need replacing in the "not too distant future," the marina manager continued.

Additional income is needed to do that, he said. In addition, with the aging membership of the Cobourg Yacht Club having given notice it may have to discontinue providing labour to lift out boats using a crane, the marina needs to acquire a boat lift. There are also health and safety concerns with continuing to use volunteers, he added.

Contrary to Preserve Our Heritage Harbour spokesperson Doug Murray's assertion that there is no business case to support expansion into the west harbour and that taxpayers could be on the hook for about a \$3-million loan, a business case was submitted with the original proposal for the project in 2013, Gauthier said.

The waiting list the town shows there is a demand for more slips, he added. The original plan called for a three-phase expansion starting with 32 additional slips (now complete); upgrades of electrical and water services to the existing docks, plus adding another 120 slips, he said.

It was a conceptual proposal and council hired a consultant to create a more detailed plan after consulting with waterfront user groups, the marina manager continued. Four different plans ended up with one of them recommended – but there was some opposition, some of it due to misinformation about the plan such as water depth in various areas, Gauthier said.

Among those groups (including naturalists, harbour area condo owners and dragon boaters) who have banded together to oppose development in the west harbour area are the Cobourg Survivor Thrivers. But Gauthier said there might be an alternative configuration of the marina expansion to accommodate the the Cobourg Survivor Thrivers practice area. The placing of buoys in the harbour recently was to get user groups to try this alternative – but that hasn't taken place, he said.

A steering committee headed by Councillor Theresa Rickerby has been dealing with the consultant's report but the status of that committee's work is unclear since council recently formed a waterfront advisory committee, Gauthier said. The new advisory committee is still being formed, he added.

Requests to speak to Mayor Gil Brocanier and Cobourg CEO Stephen Peacock were not returned by press time.

Meantime the Preserve Our Heritage Harbour citizens' group is distributing flyers to homes, encouraging people to contact councillors opposing the west harbour area development, and using social media and petitions in an effort to "convince town council to leave our harbour alone."

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