



TOWNSHIP Watch

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The Muskoka Ratepayers' Association is concerned about the new Heritage Committee, which has been recently created by Council. As ratepayers, we believe you should be concerned too.

The Heritage designation of properties should not be undertaken lightly. It is a very complex process resulting in all sorts of restrictions, responsibilities and costs -- many hidden -- because it commits the owner/municipality to maintain the building or property in its original, pristine state. A designation once conferred is very difficult to reverse. Once the Township has entered this binding contract, it becomes a maintenance responsibility for future Councils.

For many years, our Township was guided by a LACAC committee which was renamed the Heritage Committee. Committee members understood the magnitude and limitations of their responsibilities. The Muskoka Ratepayers Association was represented on these committees. During its existence, this committee's mandate was two-fold. One task was to create an extensive inventory of the buildings in the Township considered to be worthy of recognition. Under the superb leadership of Chairs such as historian Ian Turnbull and architecture expert Janet Amos, the committee members did all the work themselves, to save the Township the costs of consultants' fees. Their second task was to recommend properties for designation. They decided not to designate any private properties unless the owners so requested. This was, of course, due to the many restrictions placed on the owners, what they could and could not do to their designated properties, both now and in the future. An example of a designated public building is the Lake Joseph Church. The only private designation was the Burgess Church in Bala, at the request of the owners. The committee's budget was minimal with the Township budgeting up to \$2,000.00 per year.

Now, a new Heritage Committee has been formed under the chairmanship of Councillor Nishikawa. The Committee is requesting Council to budget **\$30,000.00** in 2012 for the Heritage Committee and any consultants required.

The committee has recommended six properties be designated in Bala. Now, they have turned their attention to Windermere and Council was recently presented with a list of 30 properties proposed for designation in that community. The plan is to identify places in Port Carling in the spring. Missing from the report of this committee was any mention of plans to inform the owners that their property has been placed on the designation list.

We are concerned that this Council does not fully understand the consequences and enormous costs associated with Heritage designation.
Let us know what you think.

We are sorry to learn that Bob McTavish has submitted his resignation as a Township Councillor of Ward A. His opinions were always well thought out and balanced. We will miss him at Council very much.