

Good afternoon. My name is Dwayne Verhey, 21 Cottage Lane in Huntsville. While most of you probably associate me with the LWRA, today I am here to address you as a resident of Huntsville.

I was not always a resident. 25 years ago my wife Kathy and I were looking for a cottage, everywhere from Bass Lake to Skeleton Lake. One of the deciding factors in favour of Lake Waseosa was that there were still a few sections of unspoiled shoreline, unlike the subdivision feel of so many others.

We fell in love with the area, so much so that within a few years we renovated and moved up here permanently. We raised our family here, supporting local businesses, participating in the community, volunteering with local groups. And now our children are doing the same as they raise their families in this community too. We are but one of many families that moved to Huntsville for these same reasons. This is a long-term economic benefit to this town, and a healthy way to grow.

One tiny lake to our south there lies a parcel of land that was still undeveloped. The owner wanted to subdivide, the other residents opposed. The owner's representative stood here in this chamber and told the council of that day that the owner had always been a good steward of the land and just wanted to provide his children with their own cottages, and that the lake could support it, and that there is an economic benefit to the Town, and so forth. And council permitted the subdivision. The lots were duly sold off to strangers. Today one of those lots features an 8 bedroom AirBNB advertised as sleeping 32 and featuring fireworks nightly. Construction on another is underway on the adjoining lot.

Was this an economic benefit? I suppose that depends on who you ask. It's a benefit to the AirBNB corporation. And the absentee landlord. And the hired gun who argued for the subdivision. But I am sure that the other residents, the ones who have to tolerate the noise and disruption and loss of property value don't see any of the supposed benefits. Once the place is built, there's no ongoing year-round employment, training or innovation. Owners of an island cottage lack year-round access and are not likely to become permanent residents.

Similar controversial subdivisions have taken place on Waseosa over the years. The Pieper development, which subdivided a parcel that was supposed to have been indivisible under a previous council's decision. The Wright-Jager development that permitted two principle buildings on a single lot. The Bradley development that allowed subdivision of a single lot into two lots, each with less frontage than the minimum allowed under even SR1 zoning.

I call it "Planning by Real Estate Agent". The Agent makes wild claims about what could be done with a property, and when they discover that their plans are precluded by the real planning documents, the purchaser comes cap in hand crying that their application is driven by economic necessity, and sympathetic councillors approve it.

It is true that there would be very few cottages around any lake if lands had not been subdivided in the past. It is equally true that the deep water environment of Waseosa would still support a Lake Trout population if there had been less development. Old-timers lament the loss of frogs, newts, clams and crayfish along the shore. In recent years, there has been an attempt to limit the extent of shoreline activity areas, but clearly such broken clumps are insufficient. So wherein lies the balance?

The staff report posted online notes that the Official Plan promotes preserving a mix of uses. The entire area is already blanketed with SR5. Converting the last contiguous remaining significant undeveloped shoreline into yet another residential development is NOT preserving a mix of uses.

Staff also notes that waterfront properties are considered “rural” and recreational dwellings are a “contemplated” use of rural lands. That is accurate, but it is also incomplete: it is equally true that both the 2006 and the upcoming 2018 versions of the Official Plan make it clear that Conservation is also an appropriate use of rural lands.

In summary then, maintaining the current zoning has as many or more benefits to this town than otherwise. There is a long term economic benefit in preserving some lands untouched, which encourages an investment in the community. Preserving the lands certainly meets the objectives of the Official Plan. It better meets the objectives of the Unity Plan, attracting diverse talents to stay in the area, rather than just pass on through. In turn, those that become permanent residents are more likely to integrate with the community. Where it is unclear how initial construction and ongoing maintenance (such as septic pumping) can be served by the requisite 2 meter pedestrian pathway, it is clear that the best way to protect the environment is not to build on it in the first place.

I put it to you that simply meeting certain minimum criteria is insufficient reason to change the zoning of these lands. Such irreversible action should only be contemplated where it can be proven that there is a clear, definitive and indisputable advantage to the community by way of the change.