

## **Draft Minutes of the Williams Lake Conservation Company (WLCC) Annual General Meeting – 9 November 2021 – via Zoom teleconference**

### Welcome and Introductions

The zoom meeting was hosted by webmaster Philip Howard, who provided a brief tutorial for participants on how to log questions, mute microphones, and use onscreen controls. The meeting was called to order and chaired by President Murray Coolican, who greeted everyone, and welcomed MPP Brendan Maguire to the meeting.

### Williams Lake Dam

Brendan Maguire provided an update on recent conversations with Tory Rushton, the new Minister of Natural Resources, about proposed solutions for the dam. On 14 December the Minister and an engineer will tour the site. Brendan will also meet with both Department of Public Works and Natural Resources personnel regarding funding for the dam. A proper assessment will be done and structural issues addressed, possibly including a full replacement of the dam. Further issues include looking at watershed inflows to Williams Lake, and engaging community knowledge and energy. A soft target date for the work is Summer 2022, and funding should not be an issue as the provincial “Green Fund” and federal government are in a position to cover the cost. Meeting regulations and obtaining permits will be a provincial matter, and both HRM and the community will be informed as the process unfolds. WLDA member Margo Kerr noted that design and tendering the contract will take time; Brendan suggested that utilizing the private sector could speed things up. Brendan urged anyone with questions or comments to contact him, and provided his cell number.

Murray thanked Cathy Vaughan for her work on assembling a history of the dam, and acknowledged Margo Kerr's important input via the WLDA's “get loud” campaign. Melanie Dobson's phenomenal work over decades on water quality and levels was praised, as were all the efforts of WLCC volunteers.

### WLCC Business

Murray proposed approving the Agenda. Several additions were made, including the issue of public access to the lake (from Robin Whyte), and two items from Charles Bull: daylighting of a feeder stream, and naming the stream that flows from Colpitt into Williams Lake. The Agenda was approved by a show of hands.

Draft Minutes of the 2020 AGM were provided onscreen. Robin Whyte moved for adoption of the minutes; it was seconded by Cathy Vaughan. The minutes were approved as read.

### WLCC Reports – Treasurer

Debbie Hall presented the Treasurer's report, with details of the current WLCC bank balance of \$4229.86 as of May 2021, and a review of expenditures and income from membership and donations. A motion to approve the financial statement, put forward by Martha Leary and seconded by Melanie Dobson, passed unanimously. Murray noted the importance of the WLCC having its own funding, to initiate projects like the bird study.

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## Williams Lake Water Levels and Quality Report

Water quality testing results were reported by Melanie Dobson, using a detailed watershed map (with special thanks to Patricia Manuel and team). A chart was shared onscreen demonstrating the increasingly low water levels leading up to the present, and illustrating that the lake is not rebounding at summer's end due to unseasonably warm dry weather. Other factors include the leaking dam and disruptions in water inflows by development, causing the water to be at its lowest level ever in October for the past 20 years.

Membership dues go towards comprehensive chemical analysis of water at 3 sites, every summer. Bacterial and coliform counts remain well within safe limits, however there was the first ever algal bloom this July in Williams Lake. Four days later the bloom was no longer visible, but in August a bloom was spotted on Cunard Pond, which closed the beach. Factors contributing to blue-green algae are slow-moving shallow water, high in nutrients like fertilizer and phosphorus, but local conditions could also have encouraged the bloom.

Melanie reported on the building of a beaver dam at the Williams Lake Road end of the lake, which has managed to retain enough water to raise the level by several feet. A discussion followed on threats to the watershed, the need to restore feeder streams, and the possibility of daylighting some streams which now flow through culverts. A chart was shared showing iron and pH levels which have both increased, noting that pH may encourage algae.

## Sparrows Hawks and Doves Bird Survey

Martha Leary reported on this joint effort of the WLCC, Backlands Coalition and the Urban Farm Museum Society of Spryfield, to further knowledge of bird species in the Backlands. A lengthy slide show surveyed some of the 76 species identified in the survey, noted how climate change is altering the environment, and highlighted the diversity of habitats contained within the Backlands. Martha stressed the important contribution of volunteers like Joshua Barss Donham, Catherine Slone, and especially David Patriquin and his earlier study. The objective is to bring together multiple local organizations, to introduce people to birding in Spryfield, and increase awareness of the importance of stewardship. The next step will be to produce maps to guide hikers through the area; the bird study will continue till March 2022.

## Love Your Lake Program

Murray introduced Kelly Schnare who reported on the Love Your Lake (LYL) program spearheaded for Williams Lake by Philip Howard and Leslie Randall. Kelly is the Project Director for Re-Imagining Atlantic Harbours, and outlined how LYL collects observational data from site visits and residents to help keep shorelines healthy and promote awareness of best practices. Kelly noted that the LYL Values Survey sent to shoreline owners had a solid response rate (50 of 80 homes), and will encourage community stewardship. She encouraged anyone with stories or testimonials about the lake to contact her by email.

## HRM Regional Plan

Kathleen Hall reported on work regarding the second review of the HRM Regional Plan, including participation with HRM Planning Staff, submission of a report, and a written response to the Themes and Directions report. Staff have now produced "What We Heard", summarizing public opinion. Kathleen underscored the importance of the environment on water quality and the watershed, and noted that in this respect Melanie Dobson's work is fundamental. The Halifax Green Network Plan and HalifACT are key to protecting the environment, but regulations need to be updated, eg. riparian buffers should be raised from 20 to 100 metres. Also there needs to be vigilance in the face of new provincial legislation that allows government to fast track approval of developments without public input.

## Catamaran Ponds

Kathleen Hall spoke to the great concern arising from the proposal to rezone 48-50 Old Sambro Road, and the ensuing effect on the ponds and connecting stream close. Melanie Dobson has outlined their importance to the Williams Lake watershed. While awaiting the Staff Report on the rezoning, multiple proposals have been suggested, including having the province acquire the land, using active transportation links to join Long Lake Park and the surrounding community, improving accessibility with boardwalks, and a birdwatching platform.

## Nominations and Elections to the Board

Kathleen Hall moved to honour David Patriquin with the ex-officio position of Honorary Director to recognize his significant contributions to the WLCC, Backlands Coalition, and area wildlife studies. Debbie Hall seconded the motion, David accepted the nomination, and it was resoundingly approved. Sanja Trussell was welcomed as a new Director. Debbie moved to accept the current slate of board members (President Murray Coolican, Treasurer Debbie Hall and Secretary Leslie Randall). Melanie Dobson seconded the motion and it was approved by all. The resignation of two directors was noted; past president Robin Whyte and Ron Doleman were thanked for their service. Congratulations were offered to Karen Robinson of the Sandy Lake community group, on HRM's approval of their border study.

## Question and Answer Period

A brief question and discussion period followed. Charles Bull suggested seeking help with mapping the Backlands from the McIntosh Run Trail Association. There was a lively discussion of possible reasons that water levels rise again in Fall, including rainfall, a rising water table, and air temperature. It was noted that Rob Jamieson's hydrology work might provide some answers.

## Other Business

Murray thanked all presenters and zoom participants, asked for any further business, and solicited a motion to adjourn the meeting. Melanie moved that the meeting be adjourned, and Craig Smith seconded the motion. The motion passed.