**Septic Savvy – An Opinion Article by Ron Higgins and Bruce Moore**

Keeping our drinking water safe and our lakes healthy was the goal behind the Septic Savvy Workshop held this summer as a joint activity of the North Frontenac Lake Association Alliance and the Township of North Frontenac. “Through this seminar we wanted to provide insight and education on how to properly maintain household septic systems” according the Mayor Ron Higgins and Alliance President, Bruce Moore.

The attendees and the presenters shared the view that, based on available information, our lakes are of high quality as was also confirmed by the Mississippi Valley Conservation Authority’s (MVCA) and our own lake associations’ monitoring for phosphorous. From this vantage point, it is reasonable to suggest that North Frontenac, at this time, is in the enviable position of not having to react to a threat to our lakes and drinking water. At the same time, the precautionary principle, voiced by the participants, was that we must not wait until we have a problem as it may be too late and involve consequences that cannot be effectively corrected. Speakers from the Federation of Ontario Cottager Associations; Kingston Frontenac, Lennox and Addington Public Health; the experience shared from Central Frontenac and the Inspector from the Mississippi Rideau Septic System Office all suggested ways to proceed cautiously that have been found to be acceptable to lake front property owners and township communities elsewhere. North Frontenac was early among the Townships of Eastern Ontario when it instituted a voluntary inspection program many years ago. Today, as has been voiced by the Mayor and Council, the central need is to continue to ensure good planning principals for septic installations and ensure that there is good communications and education for residents and visitors on how to maintain their systems.

The septic discussion always exposes different views on the need for inspections, in particular whether they should be voluntary or mandatory. The session, in recognizing that there have not been reports of faulty systems, also highlighted that voluntary inspections only work for those who desire to understand the workings, functionality and maintenance of their systems. Those who may think they have issues most likely would not ask for an inspection for fear of the costs associated with replacement or repair.

It may be appropriate to introduce additional measures to ensure that septic systems are well maintained, while recognizing that moving from voluntary to compulsory inspections may be neither necessary nor practical at this time. The costs and capacity to implement a mandatory system would be among the limitations. However, it may be appropriate to require mandatory inspections as a condition of sale for a property so a new owner is assured of a functioning septic system and/or have the repairs completed before the sale is approved. It may also be a consideration in the future to phase in an inspection programs for lakefront properties, since protecting our water sources is primarily is a greater issues for our lakes. If an initiative of this form were to be undertaken it may start by requiring inspections that are near the average operating period of most systems, being in the range of 25 years.

The seminar also learned of a number of practical ways and means for people to make sure their systems operate efficiently. The participants encouraged the Township and the Alliance of lakes to continue to share information and to hold educational sessions.

All of the material and presentations given at the June 8, 2019 Seminar are posted on the Township website.

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