

The Glengarry News

Township of South Glengarry: County Road Conundrums

July 17 2018 BY TARA MACDONALD News Staff

County Road 2 has been a hot topic lately. It started on June 18th, when Summerstown resident Doug Searl presented to South Glengarry Council with his concerns regarding parking-related issues around the public wharf by the old Dimitri's restaurant on County Road 2.

"Public wharf leads to nothing but problems"

Several years ago, the federal government handed the wharf down to the Township of South Glengarry. Today the wharf serves several functions such as a dry hydrant for the fire department too access the river to for water tanker refills; commercial use; as well as a convenient access point for cottagers who are getting picked up by boat to go over to the islands.

Nevertheless, for local residents, having a public wharf isn't always a good thing.

"The pressure comes from commercial vehicles, multiple vehicles with trailers, and from cottagers who are accessing the wharf and leaving their vehicles for long periods of time," said Mr. Searle.

"Unpleasant" repercussions

Littering was another source of concern for Mr. Searle. "The parking results in dumping of litter such as garbage, cigarette butts, and unfortunately some very unpleasant diapers and human feces which we've had to deal with," he explained.

Mr. Searle also presented concerns about public safety. "The parked cars are blocking the bike path," he said. "I've been witness to some real concerns as a result of multiple vehicles parking there. The people bicycling have to come out around and along this string of vehicles and then get back in to avoid oncoming traffic."

Troy Lapierre - avid biker and County Rd. 2 resident – confirmed Mr. Searl's concerns. "I bike by there every day," said Mr. Lapierre. "I usually have to go onto the road because of people opening doors. Sometimes I'd have to pass seven cars in a row or more. It's dangerous, especially for little kids who bike up and down the road."



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"We went through hell"

Neighbours of Mr. Searl -- Paul Eaton and Ray Dugas -- agree.

"A public wharf leads to nothing but problems," exclaimed Mr. Eaton. "Parking blocking the bike path, littering, all of those things."

However, for Mr. Eaton, the main concern was fire department access to the wharf. "It's my understanding that the wharf is a place where the fire department comes in the case of a fire to refill their trucks and draw water," said Mr. Eaton. "If I had a fire and they needed to refill their trucks, I'd like to see them be able to do that."

Meanwhile Mr. Dugas' focus was on road safety. "We went through hell," said Mr. Dugas. "It was astronomical. The last two or three years it wasn't safe to walk here because we had to go to the road. So the car was parked in a way that you couldn't walk because you would have to walk in the ditch or on the road which wasn't safe." Mr. Eaton agreed, "Parking is a problem. There's some days we can't even walk our dogs because it's too dangerous because of the cars which is not right."

"It was horrendous," Mr. Eaton chimed in. "People were parked up and down on both sides of the highway," he explained. "It was dangerous to walk, it was dangerous for people to bike, and quite frankly it was dangerous for people to drive by because you never knew when people were going to pull out in front of you. There never was an accident that I'm aware of but boy there was some close calls!"

While the parking-related problems along County Rd. 2 were presented to South Glengarry Council members as a problem resulting from vicinity to the public wharf, most respondents did not believe the wharf itself was to blame.

Residents believe popular restaurant was to blame for parking pressure

"It was because of the restaurant Dimitri's," stated Mr. Dugas. "When the restaurant was open it was horrendous," agreed Mr. Eaton, "but there hasn't been much parking since Dimitri's closed." Bicyclist Mr. Lapierre agreed, "Since the restaurant closed, I hardly notice any cars when I'm biking around that area."

While there have been rumours floating around South Glengarry that the location might re-open as a restaurant, owner William Lang confirmed that building is being renovated for use as a motel for travelers and tourists.

"There was no need for rezoning," said Mr. Lang, "the commercial aspect will allow for a motel with a rental minimum of four rooms for the traveling public."

Nevertheless, all parties agreed that blocking of the dry hydrant – located at the public wharf – continued to be a problem.

Upon inspection of the location following Mr. Searl's presentation to Council, it was found that vehicles were frequently parked in the wharf entrance blocking access to the dry hydrant.

Cottage season set to ramp-up

As the cottage season gets underway, the question of whether or not illegal parking and the problems associated with it will continue to be a problem remains to be answered.



Vehicle blocking Summerstown wharf access

"The problem is resolved," argued Mr. Dugas, "you're not allowed to park at the wharf. Yesterday there was a car parked here and there was a letter on the car, not from the Township of South Glengarry but from the Counties. It stated, 'you are not allowed to park on the bike trail'."

Nevertheless, Mr. Eaton was not as convinced. When asked whether or not he believed there would be more parked cars over the summer as cottage season picked, he responded "Absolutely."

You can use the wharf, but you can't park here

"For people who own cottages," said Mr. Eaton, "it's their responsibility to go to a marina and possibly park there or where ever they keep their boat. It's not the responsibility of the local residents to have them park in front of their houses."

"Go park your vehicle at the marina," advised Mr. Dugas. "The wharf is convenient for people on the island, but they shouldn't park here. You can use the wharf -- it's a public wharf -- but you can't park here. That's access to the fire trucks. You see the sign? You can't park here."

County's response to illegal parkers

Frank Prevost, Deputy Mayor of the Township of South Glengarry, has long been advocating for increased safety measures along County Road 2. "My concerns in regards to County Road 2 and the bike path is the traffic," said the Deputy Mayor, "It's very well travelled and there are a lot of vehicles, especially in the summer months. Vehicles seem to travel faster than the speed limit."

"This is a concern for the safety of anyone biking or walking along the shoulder of the road," Mr. Prevost concluded. "Through the counties, we need to figure out away to make it safer for anyone using the bike path."

Benjamin de Haan -- Director of Transportation and Planning of the United Counties of SD&G -- also expressed his concerns. "Parked cars blocking the bike lane on SDG 2 [County Road 2] east of Cornwall is not a new problem," said Director de Haan. "This is something that is brought to our attention regularly basis."

When complaints come in, the county will attach a letter on the windshields to notify people that they're creating a hazard and causing a public nuisance. "In our experience," said Director de Haan, "most people are unaware that they are causing this issue, and, respectfully find alternative locations to park."

To help ease parking pressure on bike lanes and busy roadways, the counties had erected additional 'no parking' signs in the area and advised the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) of the problem. "In accordance with the provisions of the Highway Traffic Act," continued Director de Haan, "the OPP have the authority to ticket cars."

Under the Highway Traffic Act (HTA), violation of parking laws -- such as parking in a no-parking zone or blocking of an entrance -- can result in a \$40 fine and possible towing.

When tragedy strikes

While waiting for an official response from the OPP, tragedy struck along County Road 2.

On the afternoon of Tuesday July 3rd, a 77-year-old male cyclist collided with a vehicle on County Road 2 at Ray Road. He was taken to hospital where he died of his injuries a few hours later.

While the investigation is on-going, OPP Constable Eric Ranger confirmed that the accident was not related to parking issues along the bike path. "A lot of people think the fatal accident was in relation to someone parking on the bike path," he said, "but there were no cars parked in that area on that day."

Nevertheless, the accident sparked action by the Township of South Glengarry, United Counties of SD&G, and the OPP to revisit bicycle safety concerns along this busy and winding country highway.

Council removes roadside parking in latest step to improve safety

"From the counties' perspective," said Director de Haan, "a paved shoulder is good for traffic safety and maintenance but it's also considered by the Township of South Glengarry to be a bike path. So that responsibility is something that South Glengarry has historically looked after."

The bike path was constructed in 2000 as a paved shoulder to the traveled portion of County Road 2. While the Counties undertook the contract, they did so on behalf of the Township of South Glengarry. "At the time of construction," explained Director de Haan, "it was considered as a 'recreational trail/ cycle path' forming part of the Waterfront Trail. The bike lane was paid for by the Township and continues to benefit from their regular maintenance."

"Maybe this is a good time to re-evaluate what's happening there," concluded Director de Haan. "Anytime there is a serious accident or fatality on County roads, the County takes time to review the issues and causes to ascertain if there are ways that we can improve safety and prevent a reoccurrence. In this circumstance, I expect that the OPP and Township of South Glengarry will be part of our discussion and debrief."

Constable Ranger confirmed the OPP was working with the Township of South Glengarry and the United Counties of SD&G.

"The township and the counties confirmed that the paved shoulder is designed as a bike path," said Constable Ranger. "We're still in the process of discussing other actions with them regarding the bike path and are working diligently to rectify the situation."

OPP release statement following tragic accident

On July 9th, the OPP released a statement notifying the public the paved shoulder running along County Road 2 between Cornwall and Lancaster, has been designated as a bicycle path and will be subject to the HTA.

According to the statement, the OPP will commence enforcement under the HTA against those vehicles who are found parked on bicycle path along the South Glengarry section of County Road 2.

"The goal of this enforcement," announced the statement, "is to protect those cyclists and pedestrians, who are using this pathway, from having to travel on to the roadway because the path is blocked by parked vehicles."

Initially, motorist will be issued a warning letter. However, if the same vehicle is found parking on the pathway again, they may be issued a Provincial Offence Notice under section 170 of the HTA and their vehicle may be towed at the owner's expense.

“South Glengarry is blessed with a scenic waterfront, which attracts campers, cottagers, cyclists, pedestrians and motorists to SDG 2. Unfortunately, the demand to experience the waterfront creates conflicts,” said Director de Haan. “The County respectfully asks that people be considerate of all the road users, and, not stop or park along the bike lane on SDG 2.”

“Parking within this lane creates a hazard for cyclists, pedestrians, and, people wanting to safely use their driveways,” Director de Haan continued. “Lastly, if you do stop and experience South Glengarry’s waterfront, please have some decency and clean up your own litter.”