

## **Report from Focus Group Meetings Summer 2018**

The purpose of the meetings was to have a dialogue with members of the Go Home Bay community and gather their ideas and opinions on the future use of the caretaker site for life at Go Home. Participants were given a tour of the property and the existing buildings. Participants filled out a short questionnaire before the discussion. The questionnaire included questions on their involvement in existing community activities and gave space for general comments on future activities and how the site could enhance community life. At the end of the discussion, a chance was given to amend or add to the questionnaire.

Seven group meetings were held at the caretaker site and one impromptu meeting led by Caroline Duncanson was held off-site. In total there were 72 participants, 44 sites, and one long time renter represented. There was a cross section of age groups; the youngest participant was 10 years old and the oldest 80.

There was a great deal of open ended discussion at all of the Focus Group meetings and there was an attempt to record all ideas, comments and suggestions. Some comments may have just been by one individual or family while others came up on a regular basis. After the first meeting, it was apparent that the discussion of the site itself would lead to a discussion of the community as a whole. This included ideas for activities and enhancing the use of the common lands and buildings. This report attempts to separate these discussions.

### **1. Caretaker Site and its future**

#### **House:**

- **Condition:** There were concerns about the condition of the building. The musty mold smell and visual black streaks on the basement walls and around the windows in the upstairs was of the most concern. Most participants felt strongly that the building needed work before it would be suitable for any kind of use, including renting, and questioned whether costs would outweigh the benefit. There was also concern that the condition of the house would continue to degrade without heating in winter and dehumidifying in summer.
- **Potential Uses:** It was generally felt that the house design did not lend itself to group activities or gatherings, and would be best used as it was intended, i.e. a residence. Potential uses mentioned included renting to individuals, providing sleeping and living quarters for artists and/or scientific researchers, and overflow space for member guests. Several participants argued that space for artists or scientists could likely be easily found in cottages as has been done in the past while others were unsure. One suggestion was to build temporary tents or yurt-type structures for scientific researchers.
- **Costs:** Many were concerned that any of the suggested uses would not supply enough revenue to offset annual costs, which would include the cost of a property manager. It was agreed that this task would be too onerous for a member of the Board or other volunteers to take on and that a paid position would be necessary. Most felt strongly that keeping the house without offsetting revenue was not desirable unless there was significant benefit to the community.

- One family suggested that the community should keep the house in the event that a future caretaker would wish to live there. Several participants at that focus group felt that it was important for the caretaker to have a winter residence in the community. In the meantime, the building could be rented to defer costs of keeping it in good shape.
- There was strong support for tearing down the house, either to allow for a simpler, low-maintenance structure to be built, or to keep the land vacant. (See below)

### **Workshop:**

- Overall, most participants felt the workshop had more potential than the house. The large open space was good, and having hydro was seen as a bonus. Suggested uses included arts and crafts, woodworking, boat building and winter storage. The loft area could perhaps be retained and set up to house overnight stays, e.g. the regatta band people. A question arose as to whether the building could be moved further down the regatta beach property to be nearer the main dock. This would make it more accessible to the main dock, and would be retained even if the caretaker site was sold.

### **Old Store:**

- Some people wished that the store could be re-established, creating a service and jobs for youth. For this reason, one family supported keeping the old store.

### **Land:**

- **Keep the land:** One of the participants said “Let us not be constrained by [specific physical design limitations of the house such as] the size of the living room: the land is the value. The land is the legacy we should protect.” This quote was from the first group meeting, but the thought was strongly supported by a majority of participants at all of the meetings, whether they supported keeping one or all structures or leaving the land open. This would not limit the choices for future generations. It was specifically mentioned a few times that the site includes a natural wetland that the Club should protect. Other benefits mentioned include the several trails leading from the site, and potential nature studies for children.
- **The Regatta party** is of major importance to people and retaining the land for that alone was seen as important. Younger participants were particularly vocal in their passion for the Regatta Party site, citing that there was good boat access from the docks and beach and good varied space, as well as the covered band shell.
- **Sell the property:** There was also strong support for the idea of selling the property and using the funds to make the main dock a better more useable gathering place.
- **Open conservation land:** Some participants felt strongly that the most important role that the Madawaska Club plays is overseeing the protection of our common lands and water. For this reason, they would like to keep the land and leave it as open natural land. Some participants want the Club to look into a conservation easement for the site, while keeping it available for regatta party. Some participants were opposed to any easement of Madawaska property: one participant, vehemently so.

- The point was made that any decision the community makes should be respectful of the neighbours and consider noise, boat traffic and light pollution.

### **Vision for the Site's future**

Several participants felt that the site had great potential for use as a gathering place. Some ideas were:

- **A picnic/meeting area:** There is a nice flat area between the current house and the dock, which is good for people with small babies and children. The docks provide easy boat access, less daunting than Long Island. The area is safer for young children than the main dock. For this use the site would require continued grass cutting and poison ivy control.
- **Washroom:** If the house is removed and the site continued to be used for activities, a washroom is desired. This could either be tied into the existing septic, or a new outhouse built.
- **Open Air Structure:** A structure with a roof covering and possibly screening to be a community hub (such as the Honey Harbour community centre). Whatever is built should be multiuse and low maintenance. Such a structure could be used for “overflow” activities as demands on main dock increase, as well as meetings, church services and other events.
- **All Purpose court:** A court for tennis, basketball, volleyball, pickleball etc. This would be a great space to just drop by, meet with friends and use like a community park.
- **Helicopter landing pad:** One person wondered if the site is a suitable spot for an emergency helicopter landing pad. Could such a pad be designed to serve the dual purpose of the landing pad and an all-purpose sports court, and would there be government funding for the pad and its maintenance?
- **Community garden**
- **Donate or Return:** Make the land available to indigenous peoples as a good will gesture.

## **2. Community**

While it is not a mandate or purpose of the Task Force to report on community activities, ideas did arise out of the focus group discussions that could be passed on to the directors of the Madawaska Club, to assist them in planning. Many of the suggestions do not depend on the Caretaker's Site and could be followed through with or without that site.

Some comments and ideas:

- It is apparent that woodworking is greatly missed. Ross Trussler may be interested in heading that up, either in the site workshop or his boat house.
- Try a family picnic on a few Saturdays, as many of the people with small children are weekenders and not around on Tuesday. Change the time of those picnics to 10:30 to noon. This fits better with nap times than a 12 noon start, and is less sun-intensive. Long Island is beautiful, but not as easy for boat landing. Other suggestions would be the caretaker's site or the point to the south east of the sail boat beach or maybe someone wants to host a picnic play date at their own cottage. Caitlin MacGregor could be contacted on this.
- Most of the 30-40 year old participants in particular felt that there needs to be improvement in community communication. Some suggestions were that the Facebook page could use more functions e.g. calendar and that there be a note on that page on how to get on the Madmail (which some of them do not receive and want to). They prefer to use phones, so info on the

website is not easily accessible, and the website probably needs updating. One commented that the newsletter is too long and boring.

On the upside, Ashley Reid/Allen is happy to help with on-line communications, and in fact she may have already contacted Mike Stephens.

- Posters and information at the main dock does not reach many people, especially those behind the library children's check-out area.
- As there seems to be a problem getting volunteers for many activities, one person suggested we should consider operating the club activities on a co-op basis with every cottage required to provide a certain number of volunteer hours. People could sign up for volunteer hours at various events on-line.
- Craft classes and library on weekends
- Music nights, jam sessions
- Orienteering and/or hiking groups to explore our paths
- Adventure Day – one day per week, including hiking, canoe or kayak day trip, trip to a different island, etc. Ross Trussler stated interest in organizing this as well
- Tool lending library: Duncan MacGregor and John Harris would be interested in looking into that.
- Add a floating dock to Long Island – this came up a few times, perhaps as a permanent fixture to facilitate easier access to the property, or maybe a few could be towed out for a special event, e.g. if we sell the Caretaker's site and try Long Island for the Regatta Party
- Fire pump training: Reinstate the Fireman's Frolic
- Boat operator license training
- Boat building and repair and/or canoe recanvassing
- Adult art classes
- Pot luck dinners, fish fry, Long Island or Main Dock
- Concerns re Regatta participation in boating races for age groups under 16. Ross Trussler reported that by his count there were only 20 individuals competing in the morning events in all ages under 16, yet there were about 100 children under 16 who he saw in the afternoon and evening, so only 20% participation (and conditions for the boating races were ideal this year). The likely reason is that most kids don't spend enough time at the Bay to be confident in the boating races. Programming e.g. canoeing workshops on weekends? Consider looking into kayak races, as there is a wider use of kayaks these days.
- Using the user pay sailing camp as a model, extend that program to include canoeing, rowing, swimming, crafts, camp craft, nature walks and lore, etc. Maybe a half day program could be considered? Or half day sailing and half day other boating, and people could do either half or a full day? The question becomes: "Will there be enough participants to support such a day camp program?" Others have mentioned that they enjoy the cottage for the unstructured time it allows their children and family.

Report submitted by Stephanie Evans and Caroline Duncanson  
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