

# MEMO

TO: Mayor Kogon and Council

FROM: Bill Schurman, Director of Recreation, and Chelsea Baird, Horticulturalist

DATE: October 15, 2018

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At the April 23, 2018 meeting of Committee of the Whole staff was directed to “*engage in research and planning to implement an aspect of Amherst's Recreation Programming at Amherst's property on Blair's Lake. Research would include reaching out to the NS Department of Environment for permits and water quality assessments as well as inviting the County to partner in developing programs, particularly programs related to canoeing, kayaking and stand-up paddle boarding.*”

According, staff has undertaken research into the potential use of Blair Lake for recreational activities. The Town of Amherst owns property, as indicated in the attached document on Blair Lake, located just outside the Town limits on MacDonald Road in Nappan.

Preliminary research has indicated that there have been motorized and non-motorized recreational boating activities taking place in the lake within the past few years. There is active use of the lake by a local Dragon Boat Racing Team on a weekly basis within season, as well as reported fishing activity. There is currently a boat launch on the lake off of the Blair Lake Road on private property, as well as a couple private floating docks. Construction of a floating dock or boat launch do not require a permit from the local building authority or Department of Environment.

There is currently nothing in place to prohibit users from engaging in any activity whether it be on, or in, the water from a strictly regulatory point of view. Anyone at this time may use the lake at their leisure. There do remain water quality concerns however. Sam Robichaud from the Department of Environment has stated that they do not regularly test bodies of water but did mention that the presence of algae blooms in the past may be of some concern as they may cause irritation upon skin contact due to the toxins being released from the algae. She also recommended that upon water quality

testing, the Guidelines for Canadian Recreational Water Quality put out by the federal government be followed. We have requested more up to date information regarding the potential use of Blair Lake for recreational use from the local Department of Environment office in Amherst. It should also be noted that the Town of Amherst storm water from South Albion does run off into the lake.

In 2005, a water quality assessment report was prepared by Darrell Taylor of the Nova Scotia Department of Environment & Labour, and is available upon request. Based on the results of the 2005 report, it was concluded that Blair Lake as a whole is very productive with respect to algal growth and was classified as eutrophic. As noted, contact has been made with the Department of Environment, who have reported that algae blooms have taken place within the past few years. Algae blooms can release toxins which may be hazardous to human health upon ingestion or skin contact.

Construction of a road into the lake would have to take place to accommodate any formal recreation program activity. This would involve the clearing and removal of trees, grubbing- removal of grass, topsoil, etc. Once the land clearing and ditching has taken place, a compacted base layer of shale would be added to a minimum depth of 18” followed by a finishing layer of Class A gravel with a minimum depth of 6”. A very preliminary approximate cost of this work ranges between \$50,000 and \$100,000.

## **Conclusion**

While there are no current regulatory issues with the use of the lake, there do remain some water quality concerns. The costs of developing appropriate access to the lake are fairly significant as noted above. With these challenges in mind, staff have not progressed to the second part of Council’s direction – reaching out to the Municipality of the County of Cumberland to discuss program partnerships. It was determined appropriate to stop at this point, brief Council and seek further direction.