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# Listowel Banner

PM43702524

Thursday, December 7, 2023

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Dan McNee Photo

**VIP STATUS** – Four lucky local youth got the opportunity to ride with Santa Claus himself during the Monkton Christmas Parade held on Saturday night, Dec. 2, hosted by the Monkton Lions and Kinsmen clubs. Hundreds turned out to watch the procession, which culminated in a social gathering and free public skate at the Elma-Logan Recreation Complex. See more photos inside on page 7.

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## North Perth ranked in top 100 of Canada's Most Livable Cities

*Globe and Mail's list places municipality at No. 81 based on various criteria*

DAN MCNEE

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**NORTH PERTH** – Based on a wide range of criteria, the Municipality of North Perth has made the top 100 in a recent Canada-wide list compiled by the *Globe and Mail*.

The national daily newspaper

released its rankings on Nov. 25. According to theglobeandmail.com, the primary purpose of its rankings "is to help Canadians identify communities where they can flourish based on their own circumstances." Criteria including local economy, cost of housing, transportation, safety and even climate were factored into

its determinations, with North Perth coming in at No. 81 out of the 439 that were included in the analysis.

Victoria, B.C. took the top spot on the list, with the top five being rounded out by North Vancouver, B.C., Winnipeg, Regina, and Burlington, Ont.

"Surprised, but pleasantly sur-

prised," commented North Perth CAO Kriss Snell of hearing the results. "It's maybe not a shocker; we've certainly been working on some of those things in North Perth over the last number of years that would up our ranking in some of those data-driven areas."

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## Council agrees to fund 50% of school bus stop arm camera pilot project

KELSEY BENT

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter  
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**NORTH PERTH** – Council plans to be a leader in school bus safety.

At the Nov. 29 budget meeting, North Perth council agreed to fund 50 per cent of the school bus stop arm camera pilot project.

The project would see 10 buses – five from Newry Coach Lines and five from Elliot Bus – equipped with cameras to document when drivers pass a stopped school bus. The 10 buses participating in the pilot project will be those that travel the busier routes, for example, Line 86 and Highway 23. The total cost for 10 buses is \$33,000.

North Perth plans to take the information from the pilot project to the province with hopes of lobbying for cameras to be placed on all school buses in Ontario.

Elma Ward Coun. Allan Rothwell originally suggested council contribute \$6,600. "My rationale for that would be two

school bus stop arm cameras," he said.

"I think it is important to remember that the province has not come to the table as of yet. As these important pilot projects start to be rolled out across the province, frankly if this council is willing, we should show the province that this is important and we are willing to put our taxpayers' dollars forward to ensure the safety and enforcement of rules which are provincial rules regarding the importance of the stopping for school buses."

Wallace Ward Coun. Lee Anne Andriesen questioned where the rest of the funding was coming from. Rothwell said the school bus operators are prepared to undertake the cost of the project themselves.

"They certainly appreciate whatever assistance can be given," he said. "If council wants to add more, that is their decision... If this council wants to undertake the full cost I'm sure Newry Coach and Elliot will be thrilled to hear that. Frankly, I would be too."

*Continued on page 6*

## 'What we are in is a North Perth crisis'

*Estimated that 9,000 North Perth patients will be without family physician in next five years*

KELSEY BENT

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**NORTH PERTH** – Stacey Ash, representing a new organization called Level Up, which is part of the North Perth Healthcare Action Coalition, delivered some sobering news regarding the future of the local health care community at the Dec. 4 council meeting.

She explained that a recent doctor departure gave the community its first taste of what the next five to 10 years will be like in the local health care industry.

"When Dr. (Lauren) Hayward announced she was leaving practice, it left 1,000 patients without a family physician or access to family health resources," Ash said. "That marked the first time for our local physicians where they were not able to absorb a patient load

from a physician retirement, at least temporarily until a new replacement could be found."

She said in the next five years, our community can count on multiplying that ten-fold.

"We are expecting six of our doctors to retire in the next five years, between them they have a roster of 9,000 patients," Ash explained. "With 1,000 orphaned and 9,000 more, the future could become very grim."

Ash shared that in the local emergency department, half of the patients coming in over the past year do not have a family physician, and provincial projections are showing that in the next four years, one in four Ontarians will be without a family doctor.

"We are estimating, just for those six retiring doctors we will need 11-12 new doctors to replace them and that does

*Continued on page 11*



Dan McNee Photo

The North Perth Fire Department conducted its annual Christmas toy and drive on Dec. 2 in front of the Listowel Canadian Tire, Zehrs and Wal-Mart locations, collecting goods for donation to the local branch of the Salvation Army. Pictured are volunteers outside Wal-Mart on Saturday afternoon, from left: Steve Kerr, Santa Claus, Nick Shantz and Tyler Bannerman.

## Howick council concerned about representation on Huron OPP board

KELSEY BENT

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**HOWICK TOWNSHIP** – It appears Howick may have missed its chance to be included in the Huron OPP detachment board, although the township was only given three days' notice.

In the portion of the meeting where council discussed correspondence, Howick Reeve Doug Harding spoke about an email from Steve Doherty, CAO of Central Huron, regarding representation at the Huron OPP detachment board.

The detachment board is composed of four existing police service board members, three municipal appointees, and two provincial appointees (with each appointee representing a municipality that currently has no police service board) for a total membership of nine.

At the April 14, 2021 meeting, the group determined that the county detachment board will be composed of 10 members: six elected officials, two provincial appointees, and two municipal appointees.

According to regulations from the Ministry of the Solicitor General, the ministry needs to know which municipalities/communities are responsible for the appointment of council members and community representatives to the Huron OPP detachment board. It was noted in an email from the ministry that this informa-

tion needed to be provided by Nov. 17.

Doherty reached out to all municipalities asking for representatives to share their preferences in terms of how the community representatives are appointed on Nov. 15.

The options presented in the email from Doherty were: the community (municipal) representative seats will be appointed by ACW, Howick, and/or Morris-Turnberry (the three municipalities without elected members on the board); or all nine communities will collectively be responsible for the appointment of the two community representative seats.

Howick Clerk Caitlin Gillis updated council that she had been informed the board had already decided that the previously selected board members would decide who the two community representatives would be.

"At this point, (Doherty) has let them know that the six communities would be appointing the reps," she told council. "My thought when I first read it was, that we would have appreciated if we had been made more aware of the requirements due to the police presence this past year, so I thought it would be relevant for Howick to have a representative there. If you are in agreement with that, we can certainly send something that says we would have liked to have been a part of the ap-

pointing of community representatives."

Right away, Harding and Deputy Reeve Megan Gibson agreed.

"I agree, we would want to have a conversation with them about this," Harding said. "Let's be honest, even though we haven't had a representative, they have looked after us. We would like that to continue."

Harding went on to say he is sure they are going to have some good representatives even if they are not from Howick Township.

Gillis asked if she should seek clarification on whether the community representatives can or cannot be members of a municipal council.

"That is my assumption based on them having the two categories," she added.

Harding said he was also confused about the community representatives.

"It confused me whether it could or couldn't be a member of council, and it is no secret that the first person I thought of was Coun. (Marvin) Grimes," he said. "I'm still not opposed to that if it would work."

Gillis said with council's direction, she could send an email directly to the policy advisor stating that they were interested in being involved.

Council agreed.

"I would like you to make a couple of emails and bring us up to speed one way or another," Harding said.

strong application.

This first phase of the county's Stewardship Program helps offset the costs of tree planting and forest health monitoring surveys for individuals and organizations. Three grant streams geared towards new tree plots, forest rehabilitation, windbreaks, stream buffers, and forest health check-ups will contribute to the naturalization and resiliency of dozens of properties across the county. Applications for the program are due Jan. 19, 2024, with successful applicants being notified in early February 2024.

For more information about the program, and to access application forms, visit [www.perth-county.ca/Stewardship](http://www.perth-county.ca/Stewardship).

## Health care crisis looming

*Continued from front*

not even begin to touch the rapid population growth we are seeing in this community," she told council.

Ash said although health care may be provincially funded, ensuring we have a vibrant health-care network here in North Perth is very much the responsibility of the municipality and its citizens.

"Of the 2025 graduating class of medical students from Western University, just under half identify as racialized," she said. "The 2027 group increases to almost 75 per cent. A significant number identify as part of the LGBTQ community. And so, as a community, we need to be welcoming and feel like a place that anyone can call home."

She shared a number of ways North Perth can support its health-care network:

supporting key initiatives, such as recognizing Nurses' Week in a public way;

advocating to the province to support fast tract repatriation of foreign-trained medical professionals; looking at health care through an economic lens and considering what the local health care costs will be when approving new developments;

declaring the clinic a municipal capital facility, thus relieving the tax burden and allowing that money to be put back into recruitment and retention efforts;

attract an urgent care or walk-in clinic by partnering with businesses that may have an interest in that area. Thus reducing some of the strain on our local emergency department. And potentially help re-roster some of those un-rostered patients; and

advocacy for training additional family physicians, and revamping funding models for nurse practitioners to relieve physicians.

Ash asked council to pass a motion to formally recognize health care as a strategic community and council priority; and support efforts to make North Perth a community of choice for family physicians, specialists, allied health-care professionals, and health-care investment.

"The municipality as a whole can do an awful lot of things for infrastructure, or any other element of a service we provide, but if we can't adequately at least provide the environment to foster positive health-care within our community, then I feel that a lot of that is for not, so to speak," Listowel Ward Coun. Matt Richardson commented. "We need to at least provide the environment to keep our citizens healthy and at least try to encourage that development."

Deputy Mayor Doug Kellum echoed Richardson's comments.

"What we are in is a North Perth crisis, we have a crisis throughout all of Ontario but especially in North Perth," he said. "This is no different than what we have been doing to step up to the plate like we did with the school buses. I think we are not only obligated but we need this for our community."

Although North Perth Mayor Todd Kasenberg said he has been heavily involved in finding solutions since Dr. Hayward's withdrawal, he pointed out gently that this is provincial jurisdiction.

"While there is a lot we can do and have done with physician recruitment, clearly the province needs to come to the table and start addressing things," he said. "My concern is when you look at medical school enrolments, we have a 10-year runway before this could be fixed. It takes a long time to produce a

doctor. And so increasing enrolments across Ontario is going to be a significant challenge that is still not being addressed. And yet we have known there is a health care problem for some time. I want to carefully toe this line. I'm trying to be involved and serve council as a facilitator, in what is not really my swim lane."

Ash disagreed by saying, "We would not have the clinic we have here, we would not have the services we have here without community contribution and leadership. Local health care is very much a local responsibility."

Kasenberg explained further that the provincial budget is what will change medical school enrolment.

"A mayor can do so much, and I have tried... we are coming into unprecedented times where we are being asked for funds that are provincial jurisdiction matters but have largely been abandoned to us," he said. "I don't disagree with you, and that is why I have personally been involved but I also think we need to be responsible to the taxpayers and what that looks like is to be determined."

Ash encouraged the mayor to not only look at the long game of increasing seats in medical schools, but also at the strong competition North Perth will face when it comes to physician recruitment.

"What we are going to see in the coming 10 years is very strong competition," she explained. "If we don't have enough doctors, every community is going to be out looking for them. Positioning ourselves now to be ahead of that, making sure we are a community of choice will help ensure we don't have that 10,000 patient deficit five years down the road."

Listowel Ward Coun. Neil Anstett suggested amending Ash's motion to include local partners.

Kasenberg suggested council receive a staff report to understand the implications to the municipal budget before passing the motion, although he did not receive any support from his council.

Richardson suggested council pass the motion, and request a report from staff.

"I can certainly appreciate the want for a staff report, however, I feel that the way the motion is brought forward it is a commitment on behalf of council to provide as much support as we can, it is not necessarily giving definitive numbers," he said. "It is to be there, to be an ally, and to be on the side of the committee the most that we can."

Elma Ward Coun. Dave Johnston agreed with Richardson.

"I'm OK passing this motion, in fact, I am very much in favour of it, but I think we should have a staff report to let us know what we are currently doing... and what we can do," he said.

Council ultimately passed a motion to formally recognize health care as a strategic community and council priority; and support efforts to make North Perth a community of choice for family physicians, specialists, allied health-care professionals, and health-care investment; and continue to work with all relevant partners; and that the council of the Municipality of North Perth adjust the 2023-2026 Strategic Plan to reflect this resolution; and that a staff report be requested on potential efforts to be made regarding the improvement of the local health-care network.

The motion was moved by Anstett, seconded by Richardson, and passed with a vote of 8-0.

## County gearing up for stewardship program

SPECIAL TO THE BANNER

**PERTH COUNTY** – A long-awaited program is launching in Perth County this December.

The Perth County Stewardship Program is a new grant program supporting community groups and landowners with tree planting projects within the Municipalities of Perth South, West Perth, Perth East, and North Perth.

Grants are available for both private landowners and community organizations. Starting Dec. 1, eligible applicants can apply through an online Stewardship Program intake form. County officials encourage applicants to read and review the program guide for tips on preparing a



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**HERE TO SERVE** - The Listowel branch of the North Perth Fire Department (NFPD) held its annual Firefighters' Breakfast on May 26 at the Listowel Agricultural Hall. The breakfast provides attendees with delicious eats served by those who work tirelessly to serve the community. The funds raised from the event go towards the NFPD, Community Living North Perth, North Perth Community Hospice and the Salvation Army Food Bank. Clockwise from above: NFPD firefighters smile as they serve up a hot breakfast; Grayson, 11, learns how to use a power stretcher in the back of the ambulance from Perth County paramedic Ryan Smith, as firetrucks and EMS vehicles were available to explore. Aspiring firefighter Finley, 9, grills up some ham alongside his heroes.

Melissa Dunphy photos

## Howick plans 'hybrid' approach to bylaw enforcement

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**HOWICK** – Council here will be taking a hybrid approach to its bylaw enforcement to make it more proactive.

Fire Chief and By-law Enforcement Officer Josh Kestner brought advised council at its May 16 meeting staff were looking for direction regarding the implementation of a proactive bylaw enforcement policy.

"This was just stemming off of the public meeting we had on April 30 that there's an expressed interest from the public in proactive bylaw enforcement," said Kestner.

"Currently, bylaw enforcement

is complaint-based in the Township of Howick [and] last year there were approximately 60 complaints."

Kestner explained that Howick residents feel that the complaints are not adequately followed through on, hence why they recommend the proactive approach.

As of now, the township requires the complainant to complete a form to ensure they are a resident of the township, the information provided is true to the best of their knowledge and the complaint is not vexatious in nature.

"We are aware of several, several issues in the township by driving around. Just as a rough estimate, there's approximately 30 properties noted that have some

degree of non-compliance – and that's just from driving around," said Kestner.

"So there would be a little bit of a backlog there as far as proactive enforcement, but we'd have to decide what we want to prioritize."

Not wanting to eliminate the complaint forms in hopes that residents may start using them more, council wants to implement a hybrid response.

"I'd like to see us try a hybrid approach to this, like we still are accepting the forms, but if you see something in your travels, you deal with it," said Reeve Doug Harding.

"Dealing with it as a hybrid model, that's achievable," said

Kestner is response to the reeve.

This is not to say that the township will be sending out fines right away, but council discussed having conversations with property owners first to investigate the issue before taking that step.

"We don't want to be aggressive," said Deputy Reeve Megan Gibson.

"We can be proactive without being aggressive," Rognvaldson added.

Council unanimously agreed to move toward the hybrid approach with priority focussed on health and safety concerns.

They will be sending out notices of when the changes will be put in place in the coming weeks once details are finalized.

## Business owners lament building permit issues, CBO offers explanations

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**NORTH PERTH** – Three local businesses claim the municipality's building department has let them down resulting in negative impacts to their businesses, which they say cost them thousands of dollars.

An email to the *Listowel Banner* from North Perth Chief Building Official (CBO) Sally McMullen explained that anyone who is planning to grow, change, or move their business needs to start with a clear vision about what they want to be able to do in the building.

"The difficulties that some projects have had relate to getting a legitimate permit but for the wrong use," she wrote.

"Once the building inspectors learn that the building hasn't been designed for the intended purpose, then the project needs to be stopped while the owner decides whether they are resubmitting the correct design or changing the use to what the building has been designed for. These decisions are no doubt hard to make if the project is already underway or the intended use isn't permitted by the cur-

rent zoning."

She added that rezoning and re-designing can lead to delays and unanticipated costs that the business owner may not have planned for.

### Cleland Auto, 81 Petals

Entrepreneur husband and wife, Shawn and Amanda Cleland, operate their own businesses Cleland Auto, a mechanic shop, and 81 Petals, a flower farm and shop.

In October 2022, the couple decided to build a new shop to house their businesses. They went about applying for a building permit through the former CBO. Once the building permit was secured, the foundation was poured in the fall, with plans for the construction to resume the following spring.

Shawn Cleland explained construction was halted by the North Perth Building Department in the spring of 2023.

"The whole frame was up. The wood was all around the outside. They just started putting steel on. And then that's when (the municipality) come in and shut us down," he said.

Amanda Cleland added that the

reasoning that was shared with them was that the old permit was done under false pretenses.

Between the issuing of the Cleland's original building permit, and when their construction project was stopped, a new CBO was heading up the North Perth building department.

Gerald Moore is the owner of RSM Consulting, which the Municipality of North Perth hired to act as the CBO while, Sally McMullen was working to get the necessary CBO credentials.

The Clelands say their issues have arisen since the appointment of the consultant.

After the construction was stopped, the Clelands were told that they needed to apply for an official plan amendment because their property was not zoned correctly for their construction project.

The Cleland's rezoning process was completed in December 2023, when North Perth and Perth County approved their applications.

Meanwhile, between April and December, the construction on their property was at a standstill.

Amanda Cleland said they were

running space heaters in the building while construction was halted, to keep the concrete from freezing and cracking which was an additional expense.

"We fought and fought and fought to put doors on because raccoons were moving in," she added.

Shawn Cleland said the municipality eventually let them put some steel on the building, and install doors. He explained the issue with the doors was that when they are installed they need to sit on a concrete floor, but because construction was halted, they were not allowed to pour concrete.

The building inspector did not want them to do any work in one corner of their building where the office and washrooms were planned to go due to zoning regulations, the Clelands pointed out. The building inspectors eventually let them pour the concrete flooring for the rest of the building to allow for the installation of the doors.

The Clelands claim this will cost them more money in the long run because they will need to have the concrete workers come back a second time to finish the flooring.

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## Let's Stuff The Truck returns

**LISTOWEL** – It makes a difference when a community bands together.

Back for its second year, Let's Stuff The Truck returns with a mission to fill the shelves of the local Salvation Army food bank.

Two trucks will be parked outside Knox Presbyterian Church, 220 Livingstone Avenue North on June 5 at 5 p.m., ready to be filled up with non-perishable donations of food and personal hygiene products.

There will also be a musical service at the church starting at 7:30 p.m. by Agnus Marie Henderson from Knox Presbyterian and the Salvation Army Band.

"By August, the food bank will be low. Everybody goes on holiday," Debora Ritchie, the event's organizer, tells the *Listowel Banner*.

When she returned to North Perth in her retirement, Ritchie became aware of this annual issue and thought "there must be some way to fix this shortage in the summertime."

Last year's event raised over \$1,600 and filled almost both trucks with donations.

This year's trucks are donated once again by the North Perth fire department and Stop 23 Auto Sales.

Two food trucks will also be parked outside the church (but you don't need to fill these ones): BeaverTails and Fo'Cheezy.

For more information on this year's Let's Stuff the Truck event, call Debora at 519-500-2122.



Melissa Dunphy photos

The IG Wealth Management Walk for Alzheimer's was held in Perth and Huron Counties on May 25. The Listowel walk was held at the Between The Lines Sports Campus' indoor walking track. All ages and abilities were represented during the walk with dozens of participants supporting the cause. This year's challenge was to take 3,200 steps to honour the 3,200 people living with dementia in Huron and Perth counties. The walk raised funds directly to support the programs offered by the Alzheimer Society Huron Perth, as many rely heavily on the services they provide. Only 60 per cent of the programs are funded by the government, leaving the 40 per cent up to fundraising efforts. Left photo: North Perth Mayor Todd Kasenberg spoke to the crowd gathered at the sports complex for the walk about the importance of the programs offered by the Alzheimer Society Huron Perth.

## Three business owners discuss building permit issues, CBO offers explanations

*Continued from front*

"Every decision they have made has cost us thousands," Amanda said. "I can't even explain how expensive they have made this build."

McMullen explained that building staff are available to help investigate zoning for construction projects, but this should be done early in the process.

"Early in the planning stages of the project is the best time to discuss zoning, this way if planning approvals are needed, they can be factored into your project's timeline. Staff can also explain the building permit process during these early discussions," McMullen wrote. "In simple terms, the application for a building permit is reviewed and if there are any areas where the information and designs submitted don't align with the building code, you will receive a message back informing you of the revisions required. When all the appropriate revisions are made, a permit can be issued."

She added that inspections are needed during the construction process. "Once construction begins, the builder or owner needs to request inspections at various stages, which are outlined in the permit when it is issued," McMullen said. "The inspectors will provide a report for the inspection and list any deficiencies in the construction or deviations from the approved plans that need to be resolved before moving on."

Another concern of the Cleland's has been the sharing of information. The couple say they are only given a little bit of information at a time, and it has added expenses to their project. The Clelands were informed by North Perth staff that they need a water holding tank in the event that there is a fire. Shawn explained that typically, holding tanks are below ground and encased in concrete. They were informed they needed this holding tank after the foundation and most of the concrete floor had already been poured. The Cleland's expect this to cost them an additional \$75,000.

Shawn Cleland explained that he thought the building was going to cost around \$700,000, but he now believes it's going to cost over a million dollars. He said they have tried to meet with Moore to look at the plans and tell them everything that needs to be done, but at the time of the interview with the *Listowel Banner*, they had not been able to connect.

"This has been the most frustrating thing we have ever gone through," Amanda Cleland said.

"All we want to do is work. And that would be a benefit to North Perth."

Her husband added that the municipality should want their businesses to operate to provide their services to the community but also for the tax base increase.

"Our taxes would go up huge ... should they not want this done as soon as possible?" Shawn Cleland asked rhetorically.

Since the construction of their new building has been stopped, he has been able to operate his business in its original location, across the road on his family's farm.

"If I didn't have (my original location), I would have lost everything," Shawn Cleland said.

His wife has continued to operate her business out of their garage.

The stop in construction has both cost them more money than they budgeted when they applied for their first permit, while also limiting them from expanding their businesses and increasing their revenues.

"We just want it done," Amanda Cleland said.

They believe that a transition in staff, that the Clelands had no control over, has caused these consequences for them.

According to McMullen, the Cleland project has been issued a building permit for a mechanic shop after two planning applications received approval, and a new permit application was submitted with designs for this specific use.

### Listowel Squash Courts

After some renovations to his business location in the summer of 2023, Alan McArthur, owner of Listowel Squash Courts, was told he should have applied for building permits. However, his issue is with the time it has taken to rectify his mistakes.

"I was very sincere in pleading ignorance," he said. "I just didn't know that I needed a permit."

McArthur had contractors install grading flooring to connect two loft spaces above the offices and washrooms. He did this to allow access to a water metre.

"The worker from Neptune would not access the area until something was put in for him to access it," McArthur said.

The contractor had explained to him this grate flooring would allow heat and airflow to come down to the washrooms and offices below, as well as provide access to the utilities.

"I didn't realize I needed a permit because 1) it was the municipality that I felt pushed me to do this, and 2) I didn't just put a couple two by tens across for him

to walk on, which I could have."

The second renovation the building department has had concerns with, according to McArthur, was the installation of glass panels between the railing posts along the loft space.

McArthur chose to put up engineered glass panels from a hockey arena to improve the visibility of the courts, but also as an anti-climb mechanism.

"Because the panels are engineered themselves, and the post didn't move, I didn't realize I needed a permit," he said.

In August 2023, McArthur was questioned about a building permit by municipal staff using his recreation facility, and later that month he said he was informed that the entire loft space (which provides a viewing area for both squash and gymnastics) was to be deemed off-limits to the public, including the original loft that McArthur claims was approved as part of the original occupancy permit in December 2020.

McArthur was informed that to start the renovation permit process he would need to obtain stamped engineered drawings, at a cost of \$6,000, for the railing and the metal grating access to the water meter.

McArthur claims the zoning for his building is also under question, however CBO McMullen said the zoning at the property where the squash courts are located has permitted commercial recreational uses for many years and is not in question.

"The building department has been working with the owner's agent for some time seeking compliance with all the applicable parts of the building code," McMullen told the *Banner*. "During this time, no orders have been issued prohibiting occupancy and the courts have been able to remain open for business."

After the first initial discussion with municipal staff, McArthur was informed that Gerald Moore would be taking care of his file. After a month passed with little communication from building department staff, McArthur contacted members of council for guidance. McArthur said little communication has been received from council members or municipal staff.

"The building department has undergone significant transition and contracted services of RSM Building Consultants, a professional firm specializing in supporting municipalities in this way, McMullen said. "They continue to support the department as the appointed CBO while I work towards full credentials and are finishing off with a short list of plans and inspection sites based

on their unique qualifications."

The North Perth Building Department's annual financial report was presented to council last month and showed a \$832,571 deficit for 2023.

"Contracted services cost more than staff do and were a necessity temporarily since enforcing the Ontario Building Code is something the municipality is required to do by the Province of Ontario," McMullen explained in her email. "A fees review has also been completed and is currently available for public comment." As reported in last week's issue of the *Listowel Banner*, current building fee levels are proposed to rise to cover the regular costs of in-house service delivery of building enforcement activities.

When McArthur opened the Listowel Squash Courts, his goal was to bring a recreational facility that did not exist before to the growing community of Listowel. McArthur said last year, his business peaked with 150 squash members and 145 gymnastics members.

"It was a good year, and then this year happened and squash memberships are down 33 per cent, gymnastics is down 27 per cent, and I probably have \$45,000 lost in revenue," he said. "I know a small business, or any business, has expenses and things they need to work through. And I don't mind that. But when you take the revenue away at the same time, how am I supposed to work through?"

McArthur said he is frustrated when he sees other franchises being built in North Perth, while he has been waiting for guidance from the municipality. He said it appears the municipality is devoting more of its resources to bringing in large franchises rather than helping small business owners.

"The municipality is clearly going through changes with staff through the building department, that's well known," he said. "But with all that being said, in the past (several) months, I've had an issue, where 25 per cent of my facility has been closed ... and at the same time, I can count at least five businesses that have opened and created from the ground up. Starbucks, Taco Bell, D.A. Virtual Sports, Rock N' Dukes, Stacked ... Why are these places able to be created and have permits issued when mine isn't?" His hope moving forward is that he can go back to running his business the way he intended when he opened it.

"This has always been a dream of mine because I just play squash, I'm not a professional," he said. "So I created this facil-

ity because I thought it would be nice to have locally for other people in the same circumstance as me. It's really just something that I want to hold its own. I'm not looking to retire next week off of this."

McMullen explained that the building department is an enforcement body, not a project consultant.

"This means that when deficiencies are identified to the owner/applicant, they are to work on revising the permit for resubmission to meet the Ontario Building Code requirements," she wrote. "It is our role to help people understand the permit and inspection process and answer questions about the building code."

McMullen said the building department has continued efforts to support growth in the community. Some of these initiatives include:

- Implementing online permitting to better track all the applications and provide 24/7 access to permits for the applicants. This allows permit holders to check the status of their application at any time, message staff, upload documents, retrieve review comments /inspection reports, and book inspections;

- Putting staff effort towards training and increasing the in-house qualifications to review and inspect various building types;

- Hosting a workshop for local builders and realtors about planning and the Ontario Building Code requirements for additional residential units;

- Presenting at the North Perth Chamber of Commerce Annual General Meeting on the topic of understanding planning and building permit processes - with references for their membership;

- Reviewing permit applications while associated planning applications are underway. She explained this cut out some of the time to line up all the necessary approvals, and;

- Ultimately ensuring that businesses and homeowners have buildings that are compliant with the minimum standards of the building code for health and safety, which is critical for managing liability risks for property owners and tenants.

Finally, McMullen explained if any applicant feels the North Perth Building Department is not meeting the proper standards, their concerns can be taken to the Building Code Commission. Additional information about the Building Code Commission and the submission process can be found at [www.ontario.ca/page/building-code-commission](http://www.ontario.ca/page/building-code-commission).



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# Listowel Banner

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Nicole Beswitherick photo

**DOUBLE HEADER** - The Listowel Legionnaires 22U braved the heat to play against the North Middlesex Sluggers on July 27. Legionnaires won 11-5 in the 1 p.m. game and 10-8 in the 3:30 p.m. game. More photos on page 9.

## Howick Fire station recognizes department members with awards

NICOLE BESWITHERICK  
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**GORRIE** - The Howick Fire Department recently held an awards ceremony, recognizing those in the department for a job well done.

On July 23, the department gathered outside the fire department in Gorrie with family and members of Howick Council, as Fire Chief Josh Kestner presented the awards.

The first awards handed out were the five-year service awards, presented to firefighters Dai Matthews, Jason Benninger and Doug Burns.

Matthews was the first of the night to walk up and accept her award from Kestner.

"I think it's really important that you're always willing to, and you're always there striving to succeed to do better," Kestner said to Matthews. She also later in the evening received a course certificate.

Benninger, who has also been with the fire department since 2019, then came up to accept his award.

"Jason is a really committed firefighter and he's a big member

of the community," explained Kestner to the crowd. He added the firefighter is also part of the Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) team "which is a really appreciated asset, especially these days when that's so important."

The fire department in Howick uses the CISM team and Peer Support team interchangeably. "Their job is to manage tough situations when they arise and promote mental and physical wellbeing," Kestner stated in an email to *Midwestern Newspapers*.

The Fire Chief joked around too, adding that Benninger will always volunteer to be the department's Sparky, "Nobody wants to put that thing on, on a hot day except for you."

Due to a conflict in his work schedule, Burns was not able to be at the event to accept his five-year service award. However, Kestner shared some appreciative words about him as well.

"He's very cool, calm and collected which we all appreciate, especially on a fire scene when it can be so hectic at times. He's also reliable in any situation."

*Continued on page 8*

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## Concerned parents of Westfield E.S. students calling for principal to resign over school-wide rainbow photo

*AMDSB says they are proud of their administrator's work*

KELSEY BENT  
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**LISTOWEL** - A group of over 100 parents on the Facebook group titled Concerned Parents of Westfield E.S. are distraught with the way the school's principal coordinated a school-wide rainbow photo in support of Pride Month on June 27.

As a representative of the group of concerned parents, Brent Shardlow, reached out to the *Listowel Banner* to share the

group's concerns.

Shardlow said he learned about the photo earlier in the month of June.

"Our principal was beginning to take things to the next step," he said. "I had heard some rumors around that there would be a Pride photo, which would be a rainbow photo of all the grades."

The staged photo would consist of every grade being assigned to wear a different color, then when standing together the stu-

dents would create a rainbow.

"Myself, I have a personal conviction against that and I was not comfortable with my daughter being a part of that photo," Shardlow said.

He explained that he reached out to the vice principal to share his concerns, and asked for his daughter to be put on a no-picture registry. He said he was told that was not a problem.

"I then began hearing rumors around the community that other parents were asking for the

same and they were being told no," he explained.

In search of confirming the answer he had first received, he contacted Westfield principal Marie Kalantzakos.

"The principal said there would be no alternative for her (his daughter) not to be in the photo," he said. "There would be no other options. You had two choices. You could keep her home or she was going to be in that photo."

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# Concerned parents of Westfield E.S. students calling for principal to resign after school-wide rainbow photo

## *AMDSB says they are proud of their administrator's work*

*Continued from front page*

"Last time I checked, she was my daughter and I will make the decision as to what I will or will not allow her to do at five years old," Shardlow said.

He went on to say that the principal was pressing him to explain why he didn't want his daughter in the photo.

"I said several times, it is none of your business," he told the *Banner*. "My choice and my convictions are mine. They are for me to decide."

Shardlow said Kalantzakos told him she "was going to stand up for all the oppressed things that have happened to the LGBTQ community since 1976 when it was illegal to be gay."

"I then reminded her that it's 2024, the war is over. I'm not telling you to drop Pride. I'm not telling you to stop. To ignore the fact that this exists. What I'm telling you is I don't want my daughter in that photo. And I have that right, as a parent to decide that. And I was given two options keep her home from a public school, which my taxes go to pay for, or she's going to be in that photo."

Shardlow said he decided to keep his daughter home from school.

"This is not about gay rights," Shardlow told the *Banner*. "It's about parental rights. And I have the right as a parent to decide what I will have my kids involved in and what I will not, and my child shouldn't have to miss something fun that every other kid is allowed to do because of one principal."

The *Listowel Banner* reached out to Kalantzakos through the Avon Maitland District School Board (AMDSB), however April Smith, Superintendent of Education (K - 12 Program Services); and Jane Morris, Superintendent of Education (Support Services, IT and Data) provided comments.

"We are part of the public education system of Ontario and part of our mandate is to educate students and staff on how we can support human rights of all of our citizens and our community members," Smith explained.

She further explained that this is embedded in curriculums starting in Kindergarten and spanning all the way through to Grade 12. AMDSB's work is directed by an Equity Diversity and Inclusivity action plan, as well as the Ontario Human Rights Code.

Additionally, all Ontario school boards have been asked to look at how they are intentionally supporting staff and students who identify with the 2SLGBTQIA+ community.

"Last year, around the same time, the minister of education asked us to double our efforts to protect 2SLGBTQIA+ students and ensure their inclusion within Ontario schools," Smith said. "He said 'It's incumbent on all school boards to ensure that these students feel supported and reflected in their schools and welcome within our communities and that includes celebrating Pride in constructive positive and meaningful ways to affirm their identities and to let educators and staff and school boards and administrators and the government know that we stand with them.'"

Smith said the practice of equity

in schools occurs all year long.

"This is not new work for us," she said. "Sure it's showed up in June, but it's actually work that we do all year. It is the core of our work. It's not just a monthly photo."

Morris explained that this is not exclusive to Westfield, this is the case in all Ontario schools.

"We see Pride celebrations in all of our schools across the district, and likely most schools across the province of Ontario, because this is a core expectation now of the work in the province."

Another concerned Westfield parent, Chris Raben, spoke with the *Banner*. He estimated that there were over 100 upset parents.

He said he spoke with an AMDSB superintendent, as well as a Human Rights and Equity staff person.

"I expressed my concerns, and I was asking for an alternative space for my daughter to go to while the picture was being taken for moral and religious reasons," Raben said.

Although he said he does not disagree with all elements of Pride, he listed what he does have qualms with.

"There's so many things that fall under the Pride umbrella and so for one, I don't agree with gender modification surgeries for minors ... I don't agree that somebody can say they're a cat or a dog and I'm supposed to treat them like that, I don't think that's right," Raben told the *Banner*.

He said he expressed his concerns to the superintendent and was shocked by the response given.

"The superintendent said, 'If I don't agree with what they stand for, then I should go to another school,'" Raben said.

Raben said his issue is with being told he needs to celebrate Pride, not with Pride itself.

"I do want to reiterate, if people want to celebrate it, they are totally free," he said of Pride. "If they want to celebrate gender modification surgeries for minors, I guess that's their right. If they want to celebrate anything Pride, that's totally their right. And I'm not against that at all. What I'm against is being told I have to celebrate it."

Raben said he understands that the Ontario Education Act dictates that schools teach students about "different family setups, etc. in June."

"I get that that's part of the curriculum, and it is what it is, but celebrating something is over and above being taught something," he said. "I mean, as a family, as a parent, we choose not to celebrate those certain aspects of Pride."

On June 27, Raben decided to send his daughter to school with a letter from his lawyer stating that she would not be in the photo.

Raben guessed that over 100 kids did not show up to school because of the photo, and others who didn't want to miss the last day of school dressed in black in protest.

"There was complete disregard for the kids' level of comfort, for the families' wishes, it's hard to even believe this happened in a Canadian school," Raben said.

Although the school board did not confirm the number of students who did not wish to participate



Kelsey Bent photo

A group of concerned parents of students of Westfield E.S. in Listowel are distraught with the way the principal coordinated a school-wide rainbow photo in support of Pride month on June 27. AMDSB says they are proud of the administrator's work.

in the photo, Morris did state that she and her colleague Smith were at the school on the day the photo and, "to be honest, it was a really fantastic, joyous moment."

"I didn't actually observe anybody who was in distress or who seemed concerned," she added.

Smith said that they both received several messages from staff, students, and parents who thanked them for their support.

"Staff thanked us and students as well said thank you very much for doing this work," she shared.

"It's just really important for our children to learn that they will live alongside, work alongside, study alongside people of all different types of identities and with different perspectives on the world and we just think that this is exceptionally important."

### Facebook

Since June 27, Shardlow, Raben, and 120 other members of a Facebook group titled Concerned Parents of Westfield E.S. are lobbying to have the principal resign and change policies to ensure something similar does not happen again.

"This is not just a couple of radical Christians," Shardlow said. "There's quite a group. I've had homosexuals reach out to me and say ... 'this is completely ridiculous, you should never be forced to have your kids get involved in anything you do not want them to.'"

Like Raben, Shardlow stated this is not about the rights of the "homosexual community."

"This is about the overstepping of a principal and my rights as a parent," he stated. "It's about the principal being unwilling to make other accommodations for students, but they do for other things."

He claims that the school does not "make the Muslim students participate in Remembrance Day, because it could be, and I quote triggering for some of them who have come from war-torn countries such as Syria, etc."

"When I went to school, the Jehovah's Witness children did not have to participate in Christmas stuff or Easter," he added.

Smith said there has not been instances where there's been separate spaces provided.

"It's important to know that as a school board, we can't actually provide a separate space where we would have students, and or staff, expressing their concern or their disagreement with another group's human rights," she said.

"We just aren't permitted to do that. It would be in contradiction to the Human Rights Code. And that's just something that we couldn't do."

Smith went on to say that Westfield staff acted as any school in the province should have, they provided a schedule for the day, so that the parents could make their own decision.

"But we absolutely could not accommodate a practice or a space where that would contravene the human rights of another group," Smith said.

In reference to the comment about exclusion from Christmas activities, Smith said, "A religious practice is different than saying 'I don't or my values do not recognize you as a human being.' So there are different instances, again, in every Ontario school, where there might be a choice by a student or a family member that we may not recognize that same religious value so we won't participate. That is not the same as saying, 'We don't celebrate the actual identity and human rights of a fellow human being.'"

Smith went on to say that Westfield administrators followed procedures correctly.

AMDSB has a Religious Accommodation and Ministry of Procedure, available to the public on their website, which speaks to exemptions related to human development and sexual health expectations.

"It does talk about that schools are not able to exempt students for instruction related to those expectations outside of that specific instruction," she said. "And, in fact, we are working just like all school boards are, to actually support this work to help our students understand diversity, equity and inclusion. There was this idea that something was not followed. We are encouraging and supporting all of our administrators and educators to actually have these conversations and to talk about difference and to talk about human rights but also this idea that it is actually a skill that we all will need to learn to be able to develop to be successful in life."

In their lobbying efforts, the group of concerned parents sought support from the local school board trustee and member of provincial parliament. Both Shardlow and Raben said the elected officials are very concerned about this.

In an email statement Vice Chair for Avon Maitland District School Board of Trustees and Trustee for the Electoral area of North

Perth, Nancy Rothwell told the *Banner*, "I have received emails and calls from concerned parents and community members. I have listened and shared their concerns with senior administration at the board office."

Perth-Wellington MPP Matthew Rae wrote in an email statement, "I have spoken with various families, including that of Mr. Shardlow and Mr. Raben, to listen to their concerns. I suggested that they, and those who shared their concerns with me should contact their local school board, and their school board trustees. Avon Maitland District School Board is responsible for the day-to-day administration of its schools and would be in the best position to address their concerns."

### Resignation and policy change

When asked what outcome they wanted, both Shardlow and Raben were in agreement that they would like to see the principal resign, and have policies changed to ensure that a space be provided to students who wish to be excluded from similar events in the future.

"Someone has to be held accountable for this. This is not right," Shardlow said.

"I honestly would like to see her (the principal) removed from her post, I don't see how she can move forward in this community, like what she did was absolutely mind-blowing that she did not care about us," Raben said. "She did not care about the different opinions."

When asked about the status of the principal's position at the school, Smith explained that the board would not discuss a human resources issue with parents, the public, or the media.

Smith added that the board is proud of the Westfield administrator.

"We're very proud of our administrator's work and our educator's work to have conversations that develop the understanding of our students around diversity, equity, and inclusion," she said.

Morris added that Westfield has a supportive community behind them.

"We've got a very robust committee in North Perth right now, a Community Engagement Committee that has nine different agency organizations that have been coming together to talk about diversity, equity, and inclusion work across the North Perth region," she said. "I feel that we are well supported by the municipality, the local police service, by North Perth Pride, by the United Way, and all the partners."

Community Living, EarlyOn, public health, and the hospital alliance, are also among the committee supporting AMDSB.

"The municipality of North Perth has done a lot of excellent work in this area, including raising the flag, we are very happy to partner with all of those organizations that work in this area," Smith added.

As for changing AMDSB policy, Smith said, "The Ontario Human Rights Code prevents any school system from providing a space where human rights of students or staff are denied. So creating an exclusion space would violate the code and we just would not do that."