

Storm water ponds 'unsafe' for winter recreation

It might seem a waste to have frozen ponds sitting idle throughout urban areas when there's a need for outdoor skating surfaces.

But a study by the Public Works Department in Shelburne has revealed that the frozen ponds should be considered as 'unsafe,' and town council will adopt a policy prohibiting the clearing of the ice for recreational uses.

The study originated earlier this month when Ken Topping and a neighbour asked the council to open the gates to a storm water management pond on Muriel Street, and also to cut back weed growth at the pond during the summer.

At the time, Public Works Director Scott Wheeldon reminded the council that the pond has been set aside as a nature area, and also that there might be a liability issue associated with opening it for public use as a recreational one.

Since then, Mr. Wheeldon had consulted with Geniver, WSP engineering, Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority and others and was told several reasons why the ponds should not be trusted as skating areas.

Jerry Haan of WSP said the water flows at the ponds year round. The water that flows in during the winter contains a mix of sand and salt. Because of the salt and relative warmth of the inflowing water and a difference in temperature at which the water freezes, the ice is possibly thinner.

WSP researched major cities across Canada that allow or disallow use of storm water ponds. Mr. Haan's report indicates that Guelph, Oakville and Calgary do not allow but Saskatoon and Edmonton do.

He doesn't emphasize that Alberta and Saskatchewan either use salt sparingly or not at all, or that Calgary is subject to Chinooks whereas neither Edmonton nor Saskatoon are. But he does refer to climate.

On the basis of the research, Mr. Wheeldon recommended that use of all storm water management ponds should be prohibited and that a policy be drafted and the ponds signed accordingly.

The council adopted the recommendation. As well, with respect to the fenced Muriel Street pond, it will be preserved as a nature area as it had been designed as such and approved by the Authority but consideration will be given to Mr. Topping's request for weed control.

In the meantime, Mayor Ed Crewson pointed out that there is a town-maintained outdoor skating rink at Greenwood Park.

By Wes Keller