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## Beach access at heart of word dispute

### Enhanced access' phrase a cause of concern for some residents

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Concerns about access to Tiny Township's shoreline resurfaced Friday over the meaning of some words in a draft of the municipality's proposed strategic plan.

The words "enhanced access" in a reference to the shoreline were enough to attract nearly 50 people to a council committee meeting reviewing a draft of the strategic plan's vision, guiding principles and high priority initiatives.

The section of the guiding principles dealing with shoreline said:

"Enhance access for all residents to Township-owned shoreline property while respecting privately-owned shoreline property" and "preserve and enhance municipally-owned shoreline property."

Doug Luker, the township's chief administrative officer-clerk, explained that some people feel the words mean "restricted."

Mayor Peggy Breckenridge tried to allay those fears, saying if a beach is owned by the township, then residents have access

"The township is only responsible for the land it owns," she said.

She also pointed out that access is available using town-owned rights-of-way, but declined comment on concerns about shoreline access at Ardmore Beach.

"We have no comment on that." But, she said, if people are questioning what the words mean council needs to "look closely at this. Just what do we mean?"

She suggested the wording be changed, and after council members made a number of suggestions, it was agreed to leave the final "wordsmithing" to Luker.

Luker told council that shoreline access and private-versus-public ownership were two major issues that emerged from the public feedback concerning the strategic plan.

Council's decision to revise the wording appears to have done little to alleviate the simmering dispute over shoreline access; a dispute that for years has divided the community and which last summer briefly turned violent.

Afterward, some cottage owners and residents who sat through the meeting expressed concerns that the strategic plan will strip them of their "right to use and enjoy community beaches."

Terry Skabernicky of the Ardmore Beach Community Association said the way they (councillors) are writing the strategic plan, "90 per cent of the township beaches will become private.

"The municipality is not intervening on behalf of the majority of township residents. All they are talking about are a handful of (township-owned) parks -10 per cent of the entire shoreline. That does not resolve the problem.

"The province hasn't dealt with it (shoreline access). They are throwing it back at the municipality," he said. "The

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bottom line is nobody is representing the majority of residents' rights."

Asked if he wants people to have the right to walk along the shoreline, he said: "It is more than that. It's about laying down sunbathing, swimming, picnicking with your family; something that has been going on since the early 1900s, that has been a traditional, historic use.

"They are trying to take that away. They are trying to allow waterfront (property owners) to circumvent a process that was installed to protect our rights."

He said his organization will continue to monitor the process and, "If we need to seek legal advice we will do so.

"In the spring when cottagers start coming up again this is going to be a far bigger issue than the Balm Beach fence," he said, referring to a fence built to the water's edge by John Mari-on.

"You are talking about peoples' emotional ties to this area. I've been coming here since the late 1960s. If the strategic plan, as they are drawing it up, allows the waterfront to privatize and take away our historic rights it will have a huge impact financially.

"If that goes through it will destroy this township. Property values will drop. Imagine the idea of cottaging being a just memory of going down to the water with your family."

Doug Lorriman of Preserve the Use of Balm Beach (PUBB), said the group remains opposed to the Marion fence and will continue its efforts to raise the money to launch a court challenge over the fence and peoples' traditional rights to have access to the beach.

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