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Residents battle for the beachfront

Balm Beach mayor tells meeting town can do nothing about fence on waterfront lot

July 03, 2008

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SPECIAL TO THE STAR

Angry residents fighting a beachfront fence on the shores of Georgian Bay were told by Balm Beach's mayor last night that nothing could be done by town authorities to stop the structure.

The crisis came to a head last Sunday when residents, upset with a fence that blocks public access along the beach, cut it down using a chainsaw. The fence encloses property owned by John and Elisabeth Marion.

While OPP are still investigating the incident, the fence is upright once again held together with yellow police caution tape.

Mayor Peggy Breckenridge told more than 50 angry residents last night that the matter was out of council's hands.

The mayor told the rowdy gathering that private property that extends to the water's edge – as it does in this case – is not a matter for council to determine.

"We cannot make decisions on private property," Breckenridge said. "You can call your MP or MPP too."

Joe Randolph, who has owned the Surf Restaurant beside the Marion's property for a year, said he'd love to have the fence removed.

"The town said my property goes to the water too," said Randolph. "But I believe the beach is for everyone."

Members of Preserving the Use of Balm Beach (PUBB) grassroots community group who asked their names not be used, are concerned about the violence they say has

occurred when they've handed out notices for their upcoming meetings.

Some have had their cars keyed, tires slashed and gardens ruined.

"I'm afraid there's going to be a death," one concerned resident told the meeting. "What are you going to do about it?"

"All of council is concerned with the safety of the people," said Breckenridge, "but the answers are not simple."

Cathy Rice, 68, has fought the fence for the past three years.

"I can't walk my granddaughter along the beach. It's closed off," she said. To date, the PUBB members have raised close to \$25,000 to take their concerns to court, she said.

"We are raising money to pay for a lawyer to go to court to fight this legally. Council has done nothing for us."