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Robbie Burns week celebration

Dan Foy of the Renfrew Highland Pipes and Drums sets the beat as, left to right, Clark Smith, Arlene Jamieson, Wes McKenzie, Tracy English and Clint Savage perform at the Robbie Burns celebration in Eganville Saturday night. The annual event is held as a fundraiser for the Bonnechere Museum. More photos on page 18.

County council left out of staggered bells discussion

Councillors disappointed, concerned winter thus far not a good example

By Neil Etienne
Staff Writer

Pembroke -- Saying they've been left out of the process, county councillors are preparing a report on staggered bells and the impact this change has on the county.

Although December offered just under 30 'winter events' for the county's plow fleet, none were terribly heavy nor did they overextend the fleet's allowable hours of work, unlike last year. The county's Director of Public Works, engineer David Darch, isn't certain it will be a good example for the two local school boards' staggered bells pilot project comment deadline approaching early this February.

Meanwhile, county staff and councillors also lamented that despite repeated requests over the last year to be part of the decision making process, or at least be left in the loop, have gone unanswered from the two boards and their Joint Transportation Consortium as well as concern over contradictory comments from then Minister of Education Kathleen Wynne (since replaced by Leona Dombrowsky in the recent cabinet shuffle).

The issue arose when Deep River Mayor Ann Aikens, whose community is one of the regions piloting the staggered bells project along with the Petawawa and Pembroke areas, asked Mr. Darch if there had been any cost analysis or impact study for the county coffers in relation to implementation of staggered bells in those regions, centred in urban areas along Highway 17. She said she was growing concerned about the review process the consortium is headed into, where the success in those regions will determine if staggered bells goes county-wide.

With a fairly light winter in terms of plowing needs, there might not be

a true representation of the financial onus placed on the county, Mayor Aikens said.

Mr. Darch said with December providing many lighter days of snow or days without snowfall but plenty of drifting, at no time were the three daily allowable plow shifts required. On days the plows run the roads three times, it costs the county approximately \$65,000.

"With respect to plowing operations, we don't have any significant statistics that show any negative impacts," he said. "I can't say there's been a negative impact yet...we just haven't had the (winter) events."

He said in creating a response to the call for public comments on staggered bells, he could make some financial assumptions based on heavier snow fall but would set about investigating the true, known impacts first.

"I'm afraid they're (transportation consortium) going to say there was no impact to the county, or no comment from the county and go ahead with full implementation without knowing the full story," Mayor Aikens said. "These (pilot areas) are mostly urban with little county (winter maintenance) involvement; it's the next step we have to really worry about."

"The next step is the costly one; no doubt about it," Admaston-Bromley Mayor Raye-Anne Briscoe offered. "The county's true impact won't be known until full implementation in the rural areas."

David Anderson, director of social services for the county, said he too is investigating the potential impact to the county-run child care services, but added the real impact will be from the rural communities and the unknowns of the all-day junior and senior kindergarten pilot program just getting underway.

See Page 5

McGuinty's 'sweetheart' deal sours local politicians seeking in-province solutions

By Neil Etienne
Staff Writer

Pembroke -- Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke MPP John Yakabuski and county councillors decried a provincial \$437 million-plus deal with a major foreign-owned and highly diversified energy concern last week while local and Ontario-based companies and even the county itself remain left in the cold.

In recent months, the county, in order to create a sustainable market for its lower grade wood supply and to address the mounting philosophical 'green energy' swing while creating jobs and diversifying the local, struggling economy, have been seeking ways to introduce industries such as bio-mass creation. Several studies and attempts to secure at least an 18-cent feed-in tariff for local bio-mass production have failed, resulting only in offers of around 13 cents per kilowatt hour, far below the 45-cent-plus offers for foreign-controlled wind or solar generation, let alone local industrial investment.

The issue hit county council chambers last Wednesday when Deep River Mayor Ann Aikens brought up the recently held and highly successful Renewable Energy Workshop, held in Renfrew December 3 with 130 participants discussing and learning about the Ontario Feed-in Tariff (FIT) program. A follow up session is planned for February at the Barr Line Community Centre to discuss opportunities under the FIT program, which isn't as attractive as it once seemed.

Mayor Aikens pointed out the Samsung deal gives the South Korean-based solar and wind power generation company "priority access" to the power grid, leaving small producers who were to be the beneficiaries of the FIT program to wonder where they now fit in.

"Small producers of alternative energy and other things like bio-mass

MPP, county weighs in on Samsung deal

that we're interested in will be offset because of that; we need to be very careful about that major announcement," she said. "It looks like the Province of Ontario is making it more difficult for independent producers of renewable energy to actually get on to the grid. The prices that they are paying for those independent people and some of those other solutions we have, like bio-mass, are less attractive than what they're providing for the South Koreans in that agreement and I think we really need to analyze what that's going to mean if we want to move forward."

"You can have all the renewable energy producers you want...if they can't get on to the grid, it makes no never mind. If this large project is going to have priority access to the grid it has significant impact to some of the other renewable (projects) we're trying to develop here or trying to advocate for using some of our renewable resources in Renfrew County," Mayor Aikens added.

The news ruffled a few feathers, including those of Madawaska Valley Mayor John Hildebrandt, who is particularly interested in seeing alternative markets for his municipality's reliance on wood products as well as helping the municipality find renewable sources of "green" energy. He said he has been investigating some form of bio-mass production at his end of the Valley for several months now, but provincial feed-in tariffs of 13 cents to those local producers are not enough to get them off the ground. The deal has him spitting venom about a government he believes is more interested in supporting foreign companies over local and grass-roots options.

His fellow Barry's Bay politician,

MPP Yakabuski, agrees fully, saying the Samsung deal is "clearly favouring foreign companies over struggling Ontario businesses."

"Choosing foreign companies over Ontario businesses is a disturbing pattern for Dalton McGuinty," MPP Yakabuski, also the provincial PC party's energy critic, said last week.

In what he calls a "sweetheart" deal, Samsung's agreement includes \$437 million in subsidies above and beyond any due under the Green Energy Act. It promises to create 16,000 direct and in-direct jobs in Ontario over the next six years. However, Mr. Yakabuski pointed out only 1,440 -- or roughly nine per cent of the total -- will be permanent.

"Considering the \$437-million subsidy they will receive, that works out to roughly \$303,000 per permanent job created," he said. "Dalton McGuinty's sweetheart deal with Samsung is just the latest example of bribing a foreign-based corporation at the expense of struggling Ontario businesses."

Mr. Yakabuski said last year, the Liberals gave French video game developer Ubisoft a \$263-million grant, adding that deal equates to about \$330,000 in subsidies per job (800 over 10 years), and promised a \$10,000 rebate to subsidize General Motors' yet-to-be-released Chevy Volt electric car, "a car that's not even made in Canada, never mind Ontario," he said, adding it is estimated that deal alone will cost some \$3.5 billion to implement.

"In total, these three programs alone work out to more than \$4 billion in subsidies to foreign companies," he said. "The Ontario PC caucus is calling on Dalton McGuinty to put an end to picking winners and losers

and focus instead on targeting taxes that would make Ontario desirable for investment without billion-dollar bribes to foreign conglomerates.

"If you applied the grant money Dalton McGuinty is paying to a French video game developer (Ubisoft--\$263 million) for 800 jobs and multiplied it by the number of manufacturing jobs lost in Ontario during (his) six years in office (284,000), it would cost Ontario families nearly \$94 billion to get our economy back to where it was when Dalton McGuinty came into power," Mr. Yakabuski concluded.



Reason to smile!

Carson Fabian of Killaloe has reason to smile after he skipped his team, Carson's Angels, to the championship in the annual Killaloe Community Bonspiel, a week-long event that wrapped up Saturday night. Team members were Darcy Lacombe, Carolyn Comerford and Erin Dick.

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