

PROJECT TO MODERNIZE THE WHARFS OF THE OKA FERRY

I, Kathleen Conway, a citizen of Hudson and area for more than 25 years and a member of the Town of Hudson's Environment Committee for 8 years, feel compelled to voice my concerns and doubts concerning the modernization of the Hudson/Oka Ferry.

I attended the December 5, 2005 Information Meeting, the Public Hearing Meetings of March 27 and the afternoon of March 28, and therefore feel that I have informed myself concerning this project.

Certain points contained in this brief are repetitions of what was stated in my letter of December 9, 2005 requesting a public hearing, and other points came to mind while attending the public hearing meetings of March 27 and 28.

One issue that keeps being repeated – and is, on its own a problem, but also creates several other problems - is the amount of traffic caused by the Oka Ferry. I see no benefit to the modernization of the ferry system as it will not alleviate the traffic congestion and in all likelihood it will cause additional traffic. The traffic issues are:

- Blockage of Main Road (to regular traffic and to emergency vehicles)
- Blockage of private driveways on Bellevue and at times on Sanderson
- Causing dangerous driving conditions as the lineup of traffic takes away nearly half of a two-lane, main entry road to the Town of Hudson
- Pollution – both air and noise - caused by continuous idling of cars – sometimes for nearly an hour individually, and collectively over the course of the day – especially on weekends and peak hours, such as provincial summer vacation dates, and holidays.

Further to the environmental aspects stated in my letter of December 9 and those voiced at the first half of these public hearings, I would like to comment on the amount of proposed lighting at the shoreline, on the docks, and on the ferries themselves. Studies show that an increase in lighting in rural areas has a negative impact on the wildlife – and, in this case, I would have to add, on the humans – in the immediate area. Considering that the citizens of Hudson do not have many street lights – why should the shoreline and the river be lit with bright lights? The impact on the lifecycle of shore animals and on the aquatic life seems obvious to me – not to mention the impact on Hudson residents that live near the shoreline.

I hesitate to even consider the modernization of the Oka Ferry as I have a gut feeling we are being misled. When discussions started concerning the dredging of the river for the safe passage of the ferry, we were told time and time again that this would not lead to larger ferries. Yet, no sooner had the dredging been completed than the proposal was put forth for the larger ferries – and interestingly enough there were already artistic drawings of the proposed ferry on the web site of the company that is slated to build them. I have since found, on the BAPE web site, a document dated June 2004, which shows a timeline for the modernization of the ferry in 2006.

I also hesitate to trust in what we are being told concerning the modernization of the Oka Ferry as the artistic drawings presented at the meetings are not to scale and therefore they tend to be misleading.

How can the citizens of Hudson trust in what we are being told?: That there will not be more than two ferries; the ferries will not be visible during winter storage; and that in the future there will be no expropriation of land and building of roads to accommodate any increase in ferry traffic?

I fully understand Transport Canada and Transport Quebec's view that the current ferries do not meet their safety standards. However the Oka Ferry's track record of nearly a century should speak for itself.

If the current ferries are not able to operate due to safety standard regulations, and the citizens of Hudson oppose the modernization of the ferry, i.e. expansion of the ferry operation, then there is only one alternative: the closure of the ferry.

Personally, I rarely use the ferry. I have probably not used the ferry in five years, possibly longer. I do not see it as an essential service – either for myself or for the businesses of Hudson. I did a quick survey of five businesses in Hudson and only one stated that if the ferry were to close it might have a slight impact on their sales. However, they had no data available to substantiate this personal opinion. I contacted: The Auberge Willow Place Inn; Hudson Variétés (aka Bob's); the Ye Auld Curiosité Shoppe (antiques/used articles); Legg & Co. (high-end clothing store); and Hudson Emporium (gift store). All, without hesitation, stated that if the ferry were to close it would have no bearing on their sales – other than the Hudson Emporium who stated that it might have some slight negative impact.

Perhaps I missed something by not attending the March 28 evening public hearing – however, I do not remember hearing even one person state that the ferry must continue to operate (other than the present owner, of course). No Hudson business person stated any pros or cons to the operation of the ferry and its affect on their establishment; and not one citizen voiced their essential need for the operation of the ferry.

I then have to ask: Why then do the residents of Hudson have to accommodate the users of the ferry – the majority of whom are not Hudson residents?

Why do we have to forfeit our rural ways – and tolerate increased traffic, possibly provide traffic patrols, pay eventually for road upkeep, have bright lights on our shoreline, winter storage of two large boats, etc. – all for the modernization of a private ferry operation?

Personally, I would regret to see the cessation of the unique, quaint and historical operation that is the Oka Ferry. However, there seems to be no other solution that would alleviate the traffic congestion, improve safety requirements, and not adversely affect the environment – both human and wildlife.

My only suggestion, if the modernization does take place, is for a reservation system to be put in force. I have traveled on several ferries that use this system and there is no backlog of traffic. People could present themselves at a designated place – or by phone/e-mail – and book passage for a certain date within a certain timeframe: for example: Monday, July 17 between 2 and 3pm. Only cars with reservations would be allowed onto the ferry property during the time stated on their reservation. There could be another line for stand-by. However, no cars would be allowed to block Main or to line-up on any roads in Hudson. There would be no need for the cars on the ferry property to idle their engines as they would not move until boarding the ferry.

There would still be, however, the issues of:

- Disturbance to shoreline and aquatic wildlife while modernizing/building the wharf and later with the operation of the ferry;
- Winter storage of two large boats with 30 foot towers
- Illumination of the ferry area
- Possible further expansion of the ferry in years to come
- If in later years the ferry were to cease operation, perhaps because it would have truly outgrown the area – or for municipal by-law regulations; we would be left with a large, useless wharf whose only purpose would be as a monument to wasted tax dollars.

In summary, I see no benefits – other than meeting current government safety regulations – in the modernization of the ferry. There are definitely more negatives than positives to this project.

The closure of the ferry might be an inconvenience to a few – but overall less of an inconvenience to the residents of Hudson and their environment than the modernization of the ferry.

If the Oka Ferry were to continue operating, as it has for nearly 100 years, using their current barge system, I would suggest implementing the reservation system described above and installing solid entry/exit ramps to replace the narrow, wood ramps that have been used for so long.

Respectfully submitted without prejudice,

Kathleen Conway (Ms.)

April 15, 2006