

Editorial ? A gross dereliction of duty

It is to be hoped that a major issue at next year's municipal elections in nearby Mono Township will be the \$250,000 waste of taxpayers' money in fighting Cliff Singer's bid to hold a few water-skiing competitions on his beautiful man-made lake near Mono Mills.

As we see it, Mono council's handling of the matter was much more than just a waste of money. It amounts to a gross dereliction of council's duty to its ratepayers.

As many readers already know, the lake in question is in an abandoned gravel pit which Singer bought in 2009, primarily to provide his daughter Chantal with a means of perfecting her water-skiing abilities, although he and his wife Judy also wanted to build a home overseeing the lake, which was produced many years ago when Consolidate Sand and Gravel was permitted to extract gravel from below the water table.

The lake in question is actually the larger of two water bodies created by the aggregates firm, and apparently a perfect size, shape and depth for water-skiing competitions. In fact, it did serve as a site for several competitions before Singer, an orthodontist who practises in Caledon, inquired with the Niagara Escarpment Commission (NEC) about the possibility of it being used for the Pan-Am Games in 2015.

When NEC decided to permit the Singers to hold up to four such events annually, but only for a three-year test period, Singer appealed, suggesting the three-year limit made no sense so long as he abided by any rules the Commission set down.

It was only then that the Town of Mono entered the picture, ultimately stretching a planned five-day hearing into about three weeks and racking up the \$250,000 in legal bills. It remains to be seen whether any of the 43 issues raised by the Town have been accepted by the hearing officer, whose report is for some reason being withheld by Ontario's Ministry of Natural Resources and Forests.

As we see it, the appropriate course now would be for Mono officials to be ordered to reimburse the Singers for the costs they have encountered to date.

However, that isn't to say that Mono had no appropriate role to play in such circumstances ? far from it.

In our view, the correct role in the circumstances was to challenge the NEC's claim to have jurisdiction over special events that involve no permanent change in land use.

Clearly, the NEC should be able to regulate any form of development in its control area, be it an estate subdivision or a new quarry or gravel pit. But as we see it, provincial law still empowers municipalities in the Escarpment area to regulate special events, particularly when they involve noise, potential pollution or any adverse impact on a neighbourhood.

Accordingly, the appropriate course for Mono council would have been to advise the NEC that it had no jurisdiction over such events and to ask the Singers to apply for a special events permit, which would be granted for a nominal fee once assurances were given that the competitions would comply with Mono's noise bylaw and arrangements would be made to clean up trash.

Perhaps the most distressing aspect of the matter is the refusal of all but one member of Mono council to accept the Singers' invitation to visit the site and observe just what happens at water-skiing trials, with only one boat being used as each competitor in turn is pulled by a boat (with a relatively quiet but powerful inboard motor) past several buoys, with the rope being gradually shortened as the competition proceeds.

(Although one day it might well become a popular spectator sport, that isn't the case today and the Singers have agreed to limit each event to a maximum of 40 cars.)

No matter what the hearing officer and/or Ministry ultimately decides, surely the Singers are owed an apology for the treatment accorded them.