

Cobourg to explore public and private beach rights

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COBOURG - Cobourg will explore public beach access rights along its Lake Ontario shoreline, the Town's executive committee stated Monday night.

Pat Stanley, a Sydenham Street resident, asked the committee to look into beach access rights, especially along Cobourg's west beach, where private land ownership and public beach use are conflicting.

"It is not just for us, but future generations," said Ms. Stanley.

Town staff have been asked to investigate the legal rights of the public to access the west beach and the legal rights of property owners along that stretch of shoreline. Ms. Stanley said people have met aggressive resistance from property owners between Ontario Street and Cobourg Creek.

"The west beach will never be the same," said Ms. Stanley.

Cobourg's executive committee also endorsed in principle, Bill 202, a private members bill recently introduced at Queen's Park, which aims to "create a right of passage" along the shoreline of the Great Lakes. The bill would ultimately establish a right of passage along the shoreline of any Great Lake between the shore of a lake and its high water mark. The right of passage would be limited to pedestrian and non-motorized traffic.

Ms. Stanley described Cobourg's west beach as a peaceful place where many people just walk along, stare out at the horizon and think. With the recent addition of the town's west beach boardwalk, which is interrupted by a private fence, the west beach is not as peaceful as it once was. She said she had heard of tourists - including an 80-year-old woman - being accosted by private property owners along the west beach.

The wild and peaceful tranquility the west beach provides is something which "rings true" for people who have used the west beach in the past, said Mayor Peter Delanty, who grew up on nearby Bagot Street.

"I remember when there would be 100 to 200 people enjoying it during the summer," said Mayor Delanty. "There is a sense of wildness to it."

Councillor Bob Spooner said he was walked along the west beach over the last 30 years and he has never seen that as an imposition on anyone. Coun. Spooner said the aggravation beach users are suffering is "ludicrous" because the beach "belongs to Cobourg".

Ms. Stanley also noted the U.S. Supreme Court recently upheld the right of passage along the American side of the Great Lakes, based on historic British law.