

Municipality of Lakeshore – Report to Council

Operations

Roads, Parks & Facilities



To: Mayor & Members of Council
From: Jeff Wilson Division Leader – Roads, Parks & Facilities
Date: February 24, 2022
Subject: Access to Lake St. Clair for Winter Recreation

Recommendation

This report is for information only.

Background

A report to Council dated December 2, 2014 (Attachment 1) explains historical information regarding the closure of the boat launch located at the Belle River Marina. At the Council meeting of December 9, 2014, the following resolution was passed:

Council secure the Lakeview boat ramp gates effective December 1st of each year or at the earliest appearance of ice to prevent unauthorized access by snowmobiles, ATVs, etc., during winter months.

At the Regular Council meeting of February 16, 2021, the following resolution was passed:

66-02-2021
Direct Administration to prepare a report regarding access to Lake St. Clair for winter recreation.

Comments

Administration has reviewed the previous reports and the above noted resolutions. The following outlines Administration's concerns related to allowing access to Lakes St. Clair for winter recreation:

Adequate Parking

There is no trail network for snowmobiles in Lakeshore, therefore access to Lake St. Clair for recreational uses (including skating, ice fishing and snowmobiling) requires adequate staging areas for parking vehicles with trailers. There are currently two potential access points in Lakeshore that could satisfy the parking needs, Belle River

Boat launch area (potentially ample parking) and Lighthouse Cove boat launch area (limited parking).

No other areas could potentially accommodate adequate parking (vehicle and trailer parking) within the Municipality.

This would require monitoring based on the volume of users.

In other jurisdictions, the Ontario Federation of Snowmobiling Clubs establishes, monitors, and grooms trail networks to accommodate snowmobiling. The local Club does not do so in Essex County. Without an organized trail network, there is a strong likelihood that snowmobilers will attempt to access the launch by crossing over private property and roads or other municipal property without authorization to do so and, as such, there will be an increase in safety and enforcement challenges.

Property Damage

To secure and protect the Belle River Marina, it has been established that the gates at the boat launch are to be closed and locked once the marina basin water freezes for the winter months. This practice helps to protect the concrete base of the boat launch from potential damage and avoids potential collisions with boat docks if snowmobile access were to be allowed.

There is nothing currently in place to secure and protect the Lighthouse Cove boat launch. Gates would be recommended if access through this launch is encouraged.

Noting the Council's 2014 resolution and now that the Municipality owns the Lighthouse Cove launch, best practice suggest that this launch should be closed during the winter to be consistent with the Belle River Marina boat launch.

Monitoring and Safety

Currently residents access the waterfront through private lands and/or unencouraged access points, by doing so they assume liability for entering onto a frozen surface that is not monitored or evaluated for risks associated with on ice activities.

Lake St. Clair is not municipal property. The Municipality does not undertake ice monitoring to ensure the stability and safety of the ice conditions of the lake during winter months. If access is encouraged, daily checks for ice/air temperature and ice thickness would be required. Specialized and/or trained staff and specialized equipment would be required.

Further, the limits of the monitored areas that are deemed to be sufficient for access would need to be confirmed and/or marked.

Enhanced in water rescue (in ice conditions) and accident response (specialized training and equipment) service levels would need to be established. Currently, the Fire Service training is limited to 300 feet from shore if conditions are appropriate to do so. Primary rescue services by helicopter are delivered by the Coast Guard or other available emergency services and are subject to visibility and weather conditions.

Controls and Management

Designated routes and speed control and/or limits into and out of the marina/boat launch basin would require planning and additional signage to be posted in winter months. No enforcement measures or staff for this are currently in place.

Security and posted hours (curfew) would be required. Gating would be recommended for Lighthouse Cove and hours of operation posted at both sites. Seasonal staff resources (with unpredictable conditions) to monitor and maintain the access would be required.

Bylaws would require updating (and enforcement) for the control of snowmobile access to the surrounding areas (i.e., adjacent parkland, beach area and trail system) to eliminate noise and damage during winter months (wet weather conditions increase damage to parks and grass areas).

Snowmobiles activities along the waterfront would make access available and easily found through other Municipal properties (i.e., beach area and parkettes) or potentially other private properties (unwanted).

Based on the above noted challenges, Administration continues to support the practice to close the gate at the boat launch at Belle River Marina on or before December 1st, and not encourage winter access at both the above noted locations. Administration also plans to include gates for the Lighthouse Cove boat launch in the 2023 draft budget.

Financial Impacts

There are no financial impacts to this report as this report is for information purposes only.

Attachments

Attachment 1 - Council Report dated December 2, 2014, Council Question – Marina – Winter Closure

Report Approval Details

Document Title:	Access to Lake St. Clair for Winter Recreation.docx
Attachments:	- Attachment 1 Council Report December 2 2014 Council Question Marina Winter Closure.pdf
Final Approval Date:	Mar 10, 2022

This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:

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