

BLA Newsletter – 2006 Mid May Update

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"To enhance people's enjoyment of Buck Lake now and for future generations"

Docktalk 2006

The Board is pleased to announce that the Docktalk Program for summer 2006 has

Ron's Home & Cottage Services

- Plumbing, electrical, tiling, window replacement
- Bathroom renovations, flooring of all types, general maintenance
- Closing cottages for winter/water supply & drain systems & spring re-opening
- Treat septic tanks/tile beds for roots
- Call Ron at 353-6919 (Buck Lake Resident)

been approved for funding by FOCA and that we have proceeded to hire a program coordinator and one site visitor, with one additional site visitor to be hired in the next few days. May will be a planning month for: the collection of resources, staff training, development of a marketing plan and contacting possible local sponsors. We hope to begin making site visits in early June at the invitation of our members and their lakeside

neighbours. If you would like more information on Docktalk, go to our website at www.bucklake.ca and follow the links to FOCA/Docktalk.

Pitch-In at Buck Lake

On the weekend of April 29th - 30th a good number of members participated to do a much needed spring clean-up along the Perth Road and various service roads around the lake. Thanks to Board members Marilyn O'Conner and Ralph Wirsig for coordinating this effort and of course to all members who did their part. A special thanks is extended to Gill Lemieux and Steve Wowk Sr. for their coverage and volume. They are the champs.

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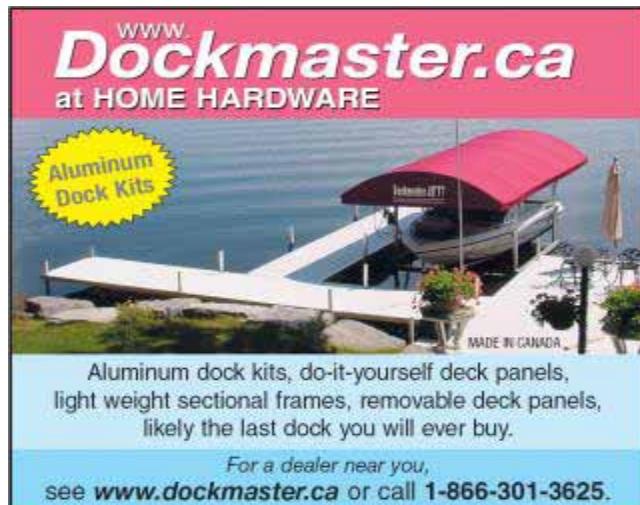
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Notes and Reminders

As boating season begins again, we would like to canvass our members and friends regarding interest in the Pleasure Craft Operator Certificate course

- being offered through the BLA again this summer. Certification for all operators is required by 2009. If you are interested in having the course offered locally please contact us through our email box at info@bucklake.ca.
- Saturday May 20th – Giant Yard Sale at Perth Road United Church 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.
- Wednesday May 31st – The AGM Newsletter will be sent to all members both electronically and by post where required.
- Saturday June 3rd – Household Hazardous Waste Disposal. The



Township of South Frontenac is providing a free drop-off depot at the Works Department Yard on the Keeley Rd. from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. This is an excellent opportunity to safely dispose of paint and other hazardous waste. Please spread the word.

- Friday June 9th – Friday Night Fish Fry at Perth Road United Church 5:00 p.m.
- Sunday June 18th – Frontenac Environmental Partnership is offering a Waste Water Workshop at the Bedford Hall at Glendower – 1381 Westport Rd. 1:00 to 3:00 p.m.
- Wednesday and Thursday June 28 & 29, Cottage Planning Seminar--- Keeping the Cottage in the Family---Perth Road United Church Hall, 7 pm.
- Saturday July 8th – BLA Annual General Meeting at Perth Road United Church Hall. Registration and Coffee at 9:00 a.m. Meeting from 9:30 to 12:00 noon. Business, special presentations and guests.

For those interested, appended are two recent Toronto Star articles on the Property Assessment Issue.

Assessment issue rattles Liberals

More study, freeze on property assessments possible government response

Apr. 29, 2006. 01:00 AM

[IAN URQUHART](#)

The provincial Liberals have been a pretty disciplined lot since taking power in 2003. For the most part, backbench MPPs have toed the government line.

That's why it was a surprise two weeks ago when 11 of them voted with the opposition to give second reading to a private member's bill introduced by Conservative MPP Tim Hudak to slap a 5 per cent cap on property tax assessment hikes.

As a private member's bill, it has little chance of becoming the law of the land. But the vote is nonetheless having serious repercussions around Queen's Park.

Liberal backbenchers have been getting roasted by constituents about skyrocketing tax bills as a result of current value assessment, a system under which properties are regularly reassessed according to their presumed market value.

The governing Liberals hasten to point out that they inherited this system from the previous Conservative regime. But their constituents don't care who is to blame; they just want it fixed. For months, the backbenchers had been bringing these complaints to the weekly Liberal caucus meetings, but there they seemed to fall on deaf ears. Particularly hard of hearing, say caucus sources, was Finance Minister Dwight Duncan.

"I don't think there was an appreciation of how strongly we felt," says one of the 11 backbenchers who backed Hudak's bill.

"Standing up and voting for the bill was sending a message to Cabinet: Get this fixed, boys," says another.

Premier Dalton McGuinty certainly got the message. In an interview with his hometown newspaper (*the Ottawa Citizen*) a week after the vote, McGuinty said: "I don't think anyone argues that there is not a problem, and the minister of finance has now become seized with this. As a government, we've become seized with this issue."

As if on cue, Duncan told the Legislature last week that he would conduct "a careful, thorough, thoughtful review" of the property tax assessment system. At the same time, however, he couldn't resist taking a shot at the Conservatives for leaving behind "a huge mess."

Duncan also raised doubts about the solution put forward in Hudak's bill. "A cap on property taxes may, in fact, cause more problems than it solves," said Duncan.

Current value assessment compared to game of whack-a-mole

Indeed. Capping assessment increases at some arbitrary level would merely shift the burden of taxes from some property owners to others.

Under current value assessment, there are winners and losers. The losers are those with properties rising upward in value faster than the average; the winners are those with below-average increases in assessment. Cap one and you affect the other.

Duncan has compared the exercise to a whack-a-mole game.

But the Liberals cannot afford to refuse to play, for the losers are complaining loudly while the winners are largely silent.

If the Liberals don't address the complaints, the Conservatives are likely to appeal to the complainants with a Hudak-like plank in their election platform.

One Liberal backbencher compares current value assessment to an "albatross" and says: "If we don't get it off our backs, we're going to get hammered in the election (scheduled for October 2007)."

As if to underscore this point, a new coalition bringing together some 700 ratepayer groups with almost 500,000 members across the province was launched at a Queen's Park news conference this week. The coalition is calling for a cap on assessment increases.

"We hope that the government, facing as it does a fight for re-election in a little more than a year, will listen to the legitimate concerns of Ontario homeowners and move swiftly to deal with an issue that has begun to spread like wildfire across the province," said Bob Topp, spokesperson for the coalition.

And if the government doesn't move? Topp promised that the coalition would be "very active" in the election campaign.

What is the government to do? There are alternatives to current value assessment — including assessments based on lot or building size, or on a property's actual selling price. But they have their own inherent inequity problems.

Uploading social services from municipalities to the province would take a big weight off the property tax base and ease the pain of reassessments. But that is too expensive a solution for the provincial government to contemplate in the short- or medium-term.

With no obvious solution in sight, then, the government is likely to freeze property assessments at their current level and appoint a blue-ribbon panel to study the problem.

Whether that panel reports before or after the next election is open to speculation.

Limit urged on property tax hikes

Group lobbies province over assessment woes

McGuinty vows to fix problems, rejects cap

Apr. 28, 2006. 05:18 AM

ROBERT BENZIE

QUEEN'S PARK BUREAU CHIEF

A new alliance of 700 ratepayers groups that claims to represent 500,000 voters is pressuring the Ontario government to cap property tax assessment increases.

The Coalition After Property Tax Reform (CAPTR) demanded yesterday that the Liberals limit residential assessment hikes to 5 per cent a year.

"We are fighting for (the) right to have a fair and predictable property tax regime. We're not asking for a rollback. We're not asking for a tax freeze," CAPTR's Bob Topp told a news conference. Topp has been walloped with increases at both his Toronto home and his cottage in Muskoka.

"Many Ontarians, particularly those on fixed incomes, are already being squeezed out by escalating property taxes. This is a tragedy," said Topp.

"If assessments continue their uneven, unpredictable and often double-digit gallop, property ownership in many parts of the province will become unaffordable for large numbers of Ontarians. We do not believe the McGuinty government wants that."

Under the controversial market-value assessment system introduced by the former Progressive Conservative government, with assessments carried out by the arm's-length Municipal Property Assessment Corp. (MPAC), the average Toronto home's value increased by 12 per cent last year, meaning big tax increases.

Meanwhile, in much of rural Ontario — with the notable exception of waterfront properties in cottage country — assessed values are declining, meaning homeowners there often receive lower tax bills.

Last month, Ontario ombudsman André Marin issued a scathing report blasting MPAC as "cloaked in secrecy" and urging 22 changes to the way it operates.

Tory MPP Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln) has a private member's bill before the House demanding a 5 per cent cap on assessments to give property owners some predictability.

"Momentum continues to grow across Ontario for a 5 per cent cap on skyrocketing property assessments," said Hudak.

But Premier Dalton McGuinty told the Legislature that there's little chance of a cap being imposed. However, McGuinty insisted his government has "an overall, overriding, all-consuming intention, which is to get it right when it comes to improving property taxation in the province of Ontario." The premier added he has instructed Finance Minister Dwight Duncan to study the issue and come up with some solutions.

NDP Leader Howard Hampton, who advocates a complete overhaul of the system, blasted the Liberals for inaction on a file they promised to address during the 2003 election campaign.

"Even though the finance minister has been studying property taxes for two years, even though the ombudsman has made his recommendations on how to fix part of it, (this) government still doesn't have a plan and hasn't done anything," said Hampton.

"The property tax system is unfair, regressive and broken."