



The Corporation of the Municipality of
Central Elgin

Remarks by Mayor Sylvia Hofhuis

News Conference Jan. 29, 2009

Thank you for coming to Central Elgin today to hear our report on our progress in seeking ownership of The Port Stanley Harbour.

First I'd like to give you a brief history of how we got here.

The Port is owned and operated by Transport Canada. It is comprised of 11.7 hectares of land, a 52.8 hectare waterlot, the west and east breakwaters and the building formerly leased by Olmsteads on the West Pier.

The whole divestiture issue started back in 1995. The National Marine Policy permitted ports that no longer served a national function to be transferred to non-federal organizations. In the late 1990s, the former Village of Port Stanley, the new Municipality of Central Elgin, four industrial users and the County of Elgin investigated divestiture of the harbour.

The County of Elgin left the table when a claim by the Walpole Island First Nation surfaced.

Central Elgin first announced it intended to enter into divestiture negotiations with Transport Canada in December 2004 and in February 2005, Council sent Transport Canada a Letter of Intent to begin negotiations. That's when the clock for divestiture really starts. Since then talks have been delayed principally because of two federal elections and one municipal election. The January, 2006 the election of a new federal government delayed negotiations until Transport Canada was again able to fund the program. The federal election in October, 2008 effectively stalled talks another four months.

So that brings us to what has been accomplished to date and what still needs to be done.

There have been questions about contaminants in the Harbour and I would like to make it absolutely clear that we are on top of the issue.

Our information to date is that the contamination in Port Stanley Harbour is typical and no greater than other facilities that had commercial operations. Even so, we require further evidence.

The key piece is an environmental risk assessment commissioned by Transport Canada. The assessment will take into consideration past reports and new research. Central Elgin has hired the environmental team at Dillon Consulting to review the Risk Assessment and all other reports.

In the event that something is missed, I can assure you that any divestiture agreement Central Elgin signs with Transport Canada will ensure that the liability for all pre-existing environmental challenges for uses planned in the divestiture agreement remains Transport Canada's responsibility.

Another question we have been asked is about dredging the harbour this summer. Transport Canada has a firm "no dredging policy" until after a divestiture agreement is in place.

Issues that remain unresolved are:

- The Walpole Island First Nation land claim. It includes Port Stanley Harbour and land created on lake bed. This claim is before the Courts.
- Central Elgin will need money to support the harbour's operation. We continue to discuss the specific financial contribution by Transport Canada for repairs and infrastructure upgrades, dredging and operating losses for the period that Central Elgin is required to operate the Harbour.
- The Legal agreements for the transfer are still being negotiated. Agreement is needed on the transfer, contribution amount, the use of the funds, auditing, etc. The agreement must provide language protecting the Municipality from pre-existing environmental issues and a successful land claim.

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That's the end of my remarks. Now I'll turn it over to Joe Preston, MP for Elgin-Middlesex-London, to add anything he would like to say.