

Sekon News



News Worthy

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Fall 2007

Presidents Report

The preceding year was full of challenges to our systems and way of life at Sekon, so I would like to thank the board and the entire community for their cooperation and support in keeping Sekon the special place we all have grown to know and love.

We are continually looking into and understanding the design of the common sanitary system sand trickling filter (leach field) in order that it may be assessed more appropriately as to design capacity, and to determine the expected life of the current installation. The low level of rain this summer has made it difficult to measure the effluent criteria and has brought attention to the under drain and design condition. We are actively assessing the design of the filter so we can plot a course with more definition. Meanwhile it should be noted, by all camps on the system, that we are approaching the maximum loading permitted.



Work Weekend

The workday was a success even though the weather did not cooperate. It was a typical Adirondack day - sun, rain, sun, rain, etc.

Volunteers:

Bill Mansfield and Yoav Kaddar, Bob Danker, Les Waters, Chris and Luke Mosca, Fred Schwarz, Karim Botros, Stu Lyons, Al, Cody, and Linda Miller

Tasks:

Removed the docks and swim platform. The swim platform was turned over so Bill Mansfield can replace the chain which is quite rusted and replace the reflectors which are broken. The ladder is also broken. Chris Mosca has repaired it several times but it's time to order a new ladder. Bill will take care of ordering.

The fire pit was a mess and was emptied and cleaned up.

The beach chairs, umbrellas and fire pit benches were stored in the shed for the winter.

The new section of dock was washed and Bill or I will stain it this week (the weather forecast is good)

Side B of the septic sand pit was weeded and raked.

The washed out area around the Monks septic diverter and the cistern behind it was dug up. No broken pipes were found which indicates that ground water is probably the cause.

Donations:

Al Crispo donated the cost of mailing workday notices to all members.

Marsha Stanley donated the cost of lunch for the volunteers.

Linda Miller added a delicious pasta salad

Since Jim and Barbara Marasco were unable to attend workday, they donated \$25 toward expenses.

Thanks to all who helped and those who supported the work weekend effort. A special thanks to Bill and Eileen Mansfield for their leadership and concern for Sekon. The Mansfield's have been outstanding stewards of the beach and docks and in general the waterfront area.. They keep a watchful eye for all of us that have camps removed from the action. Hats off for all their hard work.

Steak Roast

The steak roast was a success both financially and socially. Everyone had a great time, and Fred Schwarz was outstanding at selling raffle tickets.

The sea plane rides were a great addition and everyone enjoyed the thrill. We want to thank Al Miller for making that happen.

It would be difficult to thank everyone involved in this extravaganza but to name a few Deb & Ed Traynor, Marsha Stanley, Eileen and Bill Mansfield, David Powell, Victor DeMouth, Kate Doherty, and a host of others. I know everyone played a role in this weekend so if I did not specifically mention your name do not be offended. We appreciate all the effort.

I will let the pictures tell the story. The final numbers for the steak roast surpassed \$4,000



Good Times

Fourth of July Wooden Boat Parade and Fire works display

A typical Fourth of July day, a bit cloudy and cool. A good size crowd assembled at the beach to see the boat parade which started at the Wawbeek and made its way to Sekon before turning up the lake to Saranac Inn. The crowd waved and enjoyed the craft as they paraded by.

We would like to thank those involved with this years fireworks display at the beach.



Bill and Eileen Mansfield displayed Uncle Sam in all his glory



The weather did not slow down the parade

NEW PAC SEEKING SUPPORT

It was on a screened porch at Sekon in the summer of 2006 that the idea for a PAC (political action committee) to create a stronger voice for lakefront owners was first aired. Several Sekon members attended that meeting and a series of others through last summer where the concept of a PAC for the Tri Lakes developed. Last summer, many Sekon members participated in a survey to gauge interest in the PAC and identify issues it would pursue. The PAC has moved from concept to reality. AdkAction.org, the name chosen for the PAC, is up and running.

The goal now is to empower this organization by building its bank account so that it can play a decisive roll in local elections and influence important issues identified by its members. All the necessary paperwork has been filed with state and local officials to create the PAC. A post office box and bank account have been set up. And a web site for the group has been established at www.AdkAction.org. A core group of members have worked very hard to make this happen. Log on to www.AdkAction.org and read more.

I would like to ask all Sekon Association members or friends to consider supporting AdkAction.org by writing a check made out to that name and mailing it to P.O. Box 655, Saranac Lake, NY, 12983-0655. The suggested minimum contribution is \$100, but the PAC will be grateful for larger contributions from those who are able to give more. The founders of the PAC hope that it will attract many small to medium donations for the widest possible base of support.

Most of our members, like those of other area lake associations, are not full-time residents and may not be registered to vote here. The PAC provides a way to give them, as well as resident members, a greater voice in local decisions which impact us greatly.

Many of you responded to a survey circulated to area lake associations last summer to determine issues which would become priorities for the PAC and to rank them for action. That survey has now been placed on the web site in electronic form to make responding easy and paperless. The survey has been revised slightly based on advice from a volunteer who has professional experience writing surveys. We urge you to log onto www.AdkAction.org and take the survey again -- even if you responded to the written one last summer -- or for the first time if you did not get to take it previously. New results will compiled based on answer to the revised survey and will become the basis for PAC positions on candidates and issues. Results from the original survey last summer are posted on the site.

Anyone is welcome to take the survey. However, the ad hoc committee which met to organize the PAC last summer voted to set a \$100 minimum contribution as the level of participation to qualify an individual's responses for inclusion in setting priority issues for AdkAction.org. The survey also requires respondents to provide their identity. The ad hoc committee felt it was important to set a level of commitment which would insure that responses were legitimate and sincere.

The PAC soon will choose a permanent steering committee. If you would be willing to serve, please indicate that in your online survey, or contact USLA government affairs chair Marsha Stanley at marshastanley@mail.com.

We also would like to urge you to spread the word to your lake neighbors and friends about AdkAction.org and help us seek the broadest possible base of support. The PAC is off to a great start and with your help can become a powerful voice for Tri Lakes residents --- and perhaps, in the future, the whole Adirondacks.

Thanks for your help,

Marsha Stanley

New Taxpayer Lawsuit Filed

Harrietstown taxpayers, including many from Upper Saranac Lake and Sekon, have filed a new Article 78 lawsuit that claims that the former town assessor did not apply assessment law in a fair and equitable way, illegally imposed a surcharge on waterfront properties and unfairly boosted private property owners share of taxes by assessing state land at a lower rate.

The lawsuit asks that property inventory records be updated and that a new assessment be conducted to replace the existing flawed one.

Taxpayers filed a similar lawsuit in 2006, but in July Supreme Court Judge David Demerest ruled -- on a technical motion, not on the merits of the case -- that the amendment was so extensive that it was really a new petition. The litigants have appealed that decision.

The litigants chose to withdraw their original case rather than proceed without the strong evidence in the amendment. They revised and strengthened their petition, adding important new expert evidence, and refilled it the last week of October. The case argues that since there was no town-wide revaluation done in 2007, the defects of the 2006 assessment roll prepared by the former assessor are still present in the 2007 roll. The entire new case can be reviewed at www.citizens4fairassessment.com.

Below is a summary of the major points:

Valuation of State Land: By state law, taxable state land is to be valued as if privately owned. The State owns approximately 75% of the acreage in Harrietstown and almost 50% of the waterfront. However, the assessed value of State land is less than 33% of the total land value in Harrietstown, indicating a large inequity to private taxpayers. If this imbalance were corrected, it could benefit ALL private property owners in Harrietstown, not just waterfront owners.

The lawsuit states: The Assessor of the Town of Harrietstown has uniformly assessed State forest lands owned by the State in the Adirondack Forest Preserve at a lower percentage of value than the percentage of value applicable to privately owned land having the same characteristics. As a result of the foregoing, private property owners in the Town of Harrietstown are assessed at a greater percentage of value than State owned property, and therefore, will bear a disproportionate percentage of taxes imposed by the Town of Harrietstown and other taxing jurisdictions.”

Property Inventory Accuracy: The current Harrietstown property inventory is full of errors and omissions. If the inventory is not correct, any assessment built on the incorrect inventory cannot be accurate and equitable. Examples of inventory errors include missing structures (including an entire finished new house); unjustified changes in building descriptions (such as reclassifying a home described for many years before the 2006 revaluation as a single-story ranch as a two-story colonial, although NO structural changes had been made); changing the building use of a home from single family to multi-family (this happened to a house on Upper Saranac, despite NO structural changes). Such inventory mistakes result in highly erroneous individual assessments.

Assessment uniformity: State law requires that assessments of all real property be based on a uniform percentage of value. The litigants hired an expert to analyze sales and assessment data for the past two years. The expert is Donald F. Vitaliano, a professor of economics at Rennselaer Polytechnic Institute and an expert in statistics. He found “a very substantial and statistically significant assessment bias against owners of waterfront property in Harrietstown.” He concluded: “The statistical analysis summarized in this statement leads me to conclude that the assessor in the Town of Harrietstown has imposed a special surcharge on waterfront properties, many of these owned by out-of-state residents, amounting to a \$91,921 on average, over and above any valuation based on the market value of these properties. This is in violation of the fundamental principle of horizontal tax equity that equally circumstanced taxpayers should be equally treated.”

The number of litigants in the newly filed lawsuit rose to 110, compared to 99 in last year’s suit.

The lawsuit sets a response date for the town of Jan. 18, 2008. The litigants would be willing to agree to further time to the town to respond, giving the new town board plenty of time to work toward a fair solution which would avoid further expensive litigation, said David Wolff, who has been active in the taxpayer case.

“We are encouraged by the appointment of Doug Tichenor as the new assessor. He is a breath of fresh air in the assessor’s office,” Wolff said. “He seems to have a real commitment to making the office welcoming and open to taxpayers and seems to have a sincere desire to work with individual property owners to ensure that their inventories are accurate and up-to-date.”

Wolff said that the town could avoid expensive litigation, restore public confidence in the assessment system and give the new assessor a fresh slate by agreeing to a town-wide revaluation based on updated, accurate inventory records.

The Adirondack Daily Enterprise carried this story about the new lawsuit Thursday, Nov. 15: <http://www.adirondackdailyenterprise.com/news/articles.asp?articleID=9364>

(This report submitted by Marsha Stanley, member of the Sekon Board and Upper Saranac Lake Association government affairs committee chair.)