



SOUTH LAKE SIMCOE NATURALISTS

SLSN is a Not-for-profit Member of Ontario Nature.

Post Office Box 1044 Sutton West, Ontario, L0E 1R0

Telephone 905-722-8021

(www.slsnc.ca)

Research Partner with The Zephyr Society of Lake Simcoe (www.zephyrsociety.ca)

Member: Rescue Lake Simcoe Coalition

Member: Ontario Greenbelt Alliance

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To: Robin McDougall, B.A. KINE, DPA

Town of Georgina

Director of Recreation and Culture

26557 Civic Centre Road, Keswick, ON | L4P 3G1

c.c. Council, Town of Georgina

Tolek Makarewicz, Planner, Town of Georgina.

Re: Jackson's Point Harbour Re-development Study and Jackson's Point Harbourfront Redevelopment Plan

From:

Paul Harpley BSc. (Hons.) M.A., Doctoral Candidate Researcher, York University

Naturalists, Ontario Nature, www.slsnc.ca

Research Foundation, www.zephyrsociety.ca

President, South Lake Simcoe

Director, The Zephyr Society of Lake Simcoe

Fellow International, The Explorers Club

Norma Knowlton M.A. Treasurer, South Lake Simcoe Naturalists

Heather MacKay and Barrie Braiden, SLSN Members, Jackson's Point Residents

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c.c. B. MacKenzie-Wynia, Ontario Nature
L. Purves, Bird Studies Canada
The Zephyr Society of Lake Simcoe
Melanie Shapiera, MNRF, Aurora
Carolyn Hann, Lake Simcoe Biologist MNRF, Aurora
Paul Heeney, District Manager, MNRF, Aurora
W. Wegman, MNRF, Aurora

Melinda Bessey, LSRCA
M. Walters, LSRCA
I. Buchanan, Natural Heritage and Forestry Services, York Region
K. Reese, Natural Heritage and Forestry Services, York Region
Chief Donna Big Canoe, The Chippewa's of Georgina Island
John Espinosa, Clerk, Town of Georgina
Ontario Underwater Council
The Explorers Club – Canadian Chapter

The South Lake Simcoe Naturalists (SLSN) is a fully federated member organization of Ontario Nature. Ontario Nature protects and restores natural habitats through research, education and conservation connecting thousands of individuals and communities to nature. Ontario Nature is a charitable organization representing 25,000 members and supporters and over 140 member groups across Ontario. The South Lake Simcoe Naturalists represent many individuals and families in Georgina and the greater South Lake Simcoe Region. Our membership includes a wide range of people from diverse backgrounds and experience, professional to amateur, all naturalists interested in wildlife, nature, conservation, good planning and environmental issues. The SLSN has been involved in the community for over 25 years. Our organization has made many past submissions on the Town of Georgina Official Plans and Sutton/Jackson's Point and Pefferlaw Secondary Plan reviews since the 1990's and has commented on previous development proposals in the Sutton area, among other Regional and Provincial scale initiatives.

The South Lake Simcoe Naturalists group is participating in the current public discourse regarding the Jackson's Point Harbour Re-development Study perspectives, including many area public comments to Georgina Council and staff that have occurred in the last few months and through involvement of members of our organization that live in the Jackson's Point community. A number of SLSN members, including executive representatives, have engaged in the recent Jackson's Point Harbourfront Redevelopment Plan - Design Options Review process, including one-on-one interview and workshops. Many of our members, like many other community members have expressed issues with this process led by The Planning Partnership consultants, and have commented in various ways about this. **Now that the process is moving, we will formally address key areas of concern for our membership by geographic area: Bonnie Park, Malone Wharf, Lorne Street Parkette/Boulevard and the coastal nearshore of Lake Simcoe.**

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We note that the Jackson's Point area is perhaps the most important example of where the "Land meets the Lake" in all of South Lake Simcoe. Terrestrial and aquatic resources and species meet here.

This area at Jackson's Point is first and foremost a priority lakeshore location for natural area conservation and restoration in the Lake Simcoe Act and Plan, for which our organization (SLSN), among many others, was instrumental and intimately involved in bringing about. We believe the planning process needs to step-up natural conservation and restoration principles in its design now. This is the real and unique opportunity here; everything else should support and complement that.

We are in fact concerned things are moving perhaps too fast to fully explore, research and consider the important natural, historical and cultural heritage resources at Jackson's Point, rushing to a design solution, before all information is complete and evaluated. The fact is, there are various photographs and historical written documents about the history of Jackson's Point summarized by, for example, the Town of Georgina on their website, but actual artifacts, and other on-site revelations are perhaps yet to come. It is better that they be found before design decisions are in stone. The recent community revelations regarding new information include,

- The historical Crown land grant in 1937
- More information on the formally known history of Jackson's Point – where actual locations and artifacts have yet to be found, requiring proper and rigorous field study. This would of course include potential pre-European contact indigenous site

investigations and detailed geomorphological fieldwork of Quaternary and more recent systems which is of much interest to us, and is needed now before any design decisions or disturbances of the area are made.

- Historic wood carvings found by local community members and reported in the local press. We expect other features and artifacts and other information in this regard exist on the Jackson's Point area site.

In this regard, and by way of concrete example of our concern, we reference the recent Toronto Star article yesterday, July, 26, 2017 "Archeology beats development"! (Toronto Star, 2017). The complete halt of development from archeological finds in Toronto in a small obscure previous commercial site near the St. Lawrence Centre in Toronto, seems a metaphor for the situation at Jackson's Point, given the tremendous past known history here, including various built forms. Even smaller invaluable items like animal remains, ceramics, metal items, and glass have been excavated at the Toronto site. Jackson's Point has perhaps even more interesting and extensive possibilities. But time, expertise, planning and effort is needed now to do things properly.

There is a great design solution here. However, we caution that processes similar to the methodology of The Planning Partnership consultant's approach must be more than the result of shuffling idiosyncratic landscape architectural sketches on paper, based on perceived popularity, in a necessarily imperfect, artistic workshop process. There exists a well-developed and rigorous academic critique of these developer-supported community engagements in the literature. We suggest Town of Georgina planners investigate this information, and critically review this program of design. Many of the planning problems

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and difficulties with these approaches we have now seen emerging in the local community and being reported by the local media, an obvious manifestation of this situation.

In fact, the SLSN naturalists have been involved in past studies and related public engagements at Jackson's Point associated with the Town of Georgina spanning some twenty-five years. We have been particularly concerned with activities related to **lakeshore and coastal system disturbance in Lake Simcoe**, and specifically related to Jackson's Point Harbour: past rock groins work, interruption of nearshore longshore drift, sediment loading and silting in the harbour, impact on down lake fish spawning areas and weed and algae development in the area. **Our organization has made past technical submissions to the Town of Georgina, study leaders and other consultants over these many years. The concerns persist. We note that current study has identified siltation and weed development and related aquatic deterioration. We are concerned these will lead in the future to expensive dredging and other remediation activities.**

Bonnie Park:

The SLSN believe the existing Bonnie Park is an invaluable resource to the Town of Georgina and its community as a natural greenspace. We believe there are modest re-design opportunities here which our membership has for years noted and advised on for over twenty years in Jackson's Point planning programs that have been driven and managed by local businesses. Over the years various grant monies were acquired for this investigation, which have not resulted in substantive improvements in Bonnie Park as we would like it to be. Especially they have not provided improvements to facilities and natural heritage conservation that our organization's members have wanted to see. We hope this new planning process will finally work with the conservation of the existing natural and cultural features and their retention, restoration and expansion where possible as the prime resource management focus. **At the recent consultant-led workshops we advised that new naturalization/restoration initiation of the existing Park area at the beach could highlight natural Lake Simcoe shoreline/coastal native species and features (a very rare ecosystem) at edges and strategic locations to compliment the important natural recreation use in Bonnie Park.**

The other desired social and economic advances will follow. **We, SLSN, would propose to partner with the Town of Georgia and other agencies to make this happen here in the future. We have not seen this ecological restoration approach articulated in these current plans independent of the area of large business concerns/ land owners in the area, which has unfortunately been the past thrust and**

focus of past initiatives. We share the articulated concerns of other community members, presented to Council and Town staff in recent months, that in regard to Bonnie Park, conservation and modest improvement should be the central focus of interest for Town concern.

Consequently, we strongly believe and advocate that the Park at Jackson's Point be a continued geographic presence, and its conservation, natural heritage restoration and continued recreation use

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be for Town residents, local community members and visitors. Though we have been willing to consider its relationship with other private landowner/developers in the area we advocate for it to remain as it is in perpetuity, as a green and natural recreation facility. We feel financial resources of the Town should be focused on this priority first and foremost.

Malone Wharf:

The present condition of the Malone Wharf area of Jackson's Point is poor. It has been this way for many years, thoroughly unwelcoming to residents and visitors alike, to the considerable dismay of our membership. The space needs to be re-designed as a publically accessible, attractive, natural and welcoming place, a situation long overdue. The asphalt potholes, seasonal puddles, lack of park benches, grass and landscape areas, and the presence of an unattractive private business lake barge in this high profile area, with workers and vehicles on a consistent basis is unacceptable.

We advocate full public use of the space with a focus on passive short-term tourist scenic opportunity for northern York Region visitors and other day trip visitors to see and experience Lake Simcoe. Of course, local residents of Jackson's Point must have priority of access to this space by foot and bicycle from their residences, by new local pathway provision. Shade provision, attractive natural and cultural heritage signage and other public amenities must be a priority, now. Whether tourist, angler, naturalist or local resident, point of pride in this area is a manifestation of arguably the most spectacular scenic view opportunity of Lake Simcoe, must be number one here. The sensitive management of the opportunity is the real challenge of this process.

In this regard our naturalist organization members regularly visit the **Malone Wharf area bird watching and for views and experience of Lake Simcoe. Other naturalists and specialist birders visit the Point at Malone Wharf from all over the Greater Toronto area and beyond.** This location is famous far and wide as an important accessible birding spot, but its deplorable condition over many years has not been instrumental in endearing it to many. **Today the point is decidedly uninviting and not well set up for these important eco-tourism resource opportunities.** The Town of Georgina is presently, and in the past has not benefitted substantially from this opportunity of upwardly-mobile eco-tourists, generally many with disposable income, and knowledgeable non-consumptive resource users that could promote the Town of Georgina to many others as a welcoming naturalist and recreation destination.

We submit a significant opportunity for wildlife viewing and interpretation exists at the Malone Wharf location, and propose a modest feature **"Birding" Node** be designed and developed here to take advantage of this opportunity. **We recommend a modest functional structure be developed here. We can recommend the siting of such a structure and it's design and construction, based on others in Ontario and Canada and internationally. The SLSN would be happy to partner with the Town of Georgina, Region of York and others to develop this asset.** We believe Grant monies could be available for this initiative. There are many important and significant bird records of Regional and Provincial

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interest that we are aware of and have documented over more than twenty years. Although we proposed the idea of a "Birding" Node at Malone Wharf in the recent Planning Partnership workshops, and conceptually suggested a location, we do not see articulation of it in recent process concepts.

In this regard some of SLSN member are **Snorkelling and Diving enthusiasts** and very aware of the important value of the **marine railway at Malone Wharf and other archaeological features which we have in the past identified and explored. See below past**

information on these features documented in the Georgina Advocate newspaper in 1999 (Georgina Advocate, 1999). The appropriate designation and conservation of these features, and recognition that no development of this area be proposed is SLSN central concern. Opportunity exists for the Town of Georgina to act immediately to protect this unique cultural heritage artifact/tourism resource, and welcome snorkel and scuba divers to visit Georgina to enjoy it. This then is yet another recreation and cultural heritage feature in a natural heritage setting which we feel needs to be sensitively considered in this landscape area, and integrated into land use design in this current planning process.

We note that even the Malone Wharf itself is a small spatially limited area, as is the Bonnie Park and we caution town staff, Council and consultants that some grandiose ideas discussed and articulated in this process are not possible in our view, nor appropriate in this limited essentially natural and sensitive coastal Lake Simcoe location. We have not seen this ecological restoration approach articulated in these current plans.

In this regard we also note the current paid use of the Malone Wharf area by visitors and believe this needs more review and thought with design considerations given the constricted space and multiple uses expected in this area.

There are some examples of similar management of public users of small sensitive use areas in Ontario and beyond. Many of them are decidedly not particularly successful. This aspect of the Jackson's Point re-development plan needs much more sensitive design and planning attention.

Lorne Street Parkette/Boulevard

This existing Park area is a valuable natural area at Jackson's Point and our SLSN local members feel it is a very important recreational feature as is in the community. It is always used by local community and visitors for foot travel walking, dog walking and children's play area. We advocate the complete natural area conservation of this property for low impact passive recreation and natural heritage restoration. Similar to the Bonnie Boats site we would like to see a **new naturalization/restoration initiation of the existing Park area at the beach which could highlight natural Lake Simcoe shoreline/coastal native species and features (a very rare ecosystem) at edges and strategic locations to simulate back beach grassland meadow representative of Lake Simcoe ecosystems to compliment the important natural recreation use already occurring here. We SLSN would propose to partner with the Town of Georgia**

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and other agencies to make this happen here in the future. We have not seen this ecological restoration approach articulated in these current plans.

SLSN Priorities for Jackson's Point Harbour Re-development Study and Jackson's Point Harbourfront Redevelopment Plan

SLSN membership representatives have had an opportunity to bring together a list of key Priority human uses of the Jackson's Point area for our memberships perspective. We have listed them below for reference. These uses are particularly relevant for Bonnie Park, Malone Wharf, and the Lorne Street Parkette/Boulevard open space areas.

- Walking
- Walking dogs (provides shade in the summer)
- Walking babies/toddlers in baby carriages/strollers (provides shade in the summer)
- Playground for children
- Boat/Seado launch
- Swimming
- Snorkelling and diving
- Picnicking

- Relaxing by the water
- Fishing
- Ice fishing
- People who work in the area have their lunch there
- Specialist Bird Watching and novice watching birds, ducks, geese and other wildlife
- Sailing and boating

Jackson's Pt.'s hidden treasure

A couple of weeks ago I had the opportunity to dive on the remains of the old marine railway under the water just off Jackson's Point.

Paul Harpley and I donned fins and snorkling gear and waded into the warm shallows at the foot of Malone St. where the government dock is located.

Almost immediately upon submerging, the massive, more than century old logs loomed about 15 feet below us. I'd known the structure was there having lost enough expensive lures on it, but I'd never been up close under water.

Having seen it, I can understand why divers are so enthusiastic about preserving it. For one thing, it's much larger than I thought, curving away for about 200 feet into the lake. It's teeming with fish that swim in, around and under the huge interlocking logs, and further on, lying fully visible on the bottom, is a massive wheel, likely from the marine rail carriage. Thanks to the zebra mussels (it's an ill wind, eh?), the water is now clear enough to see right to the bottom.

Paul sketched the wheel (below), which is about three feet in diameter and six inches thick, and noted the inscription 'Dominion Wheel and



My Opinion John Slykhuis

Foundary Toronto'.

Paul dove on it again a few days later and discovered someone had managed to turn the wheel over, revealing a different design. Thank goodness it's too heavy for someone to drag ashore - at least for now, which gives more weight to the argument that this entire underwater site should be designated a heritage site and preserved for future generations.

The new harbour breakwater offers shelter for divers who in the past had to dodge hotdogs on jetskis and motorboats pulling into the bay.

With the Toronto area having the largest number of divers in the country, this site has the potential to be a great tourist attraction. You only have to look at the thousands of divers who converge on Tobermory to view the wrecks there every year. Incidentally,

Paul who's also dived there, thinks the marine railway is a more attractive dive site.

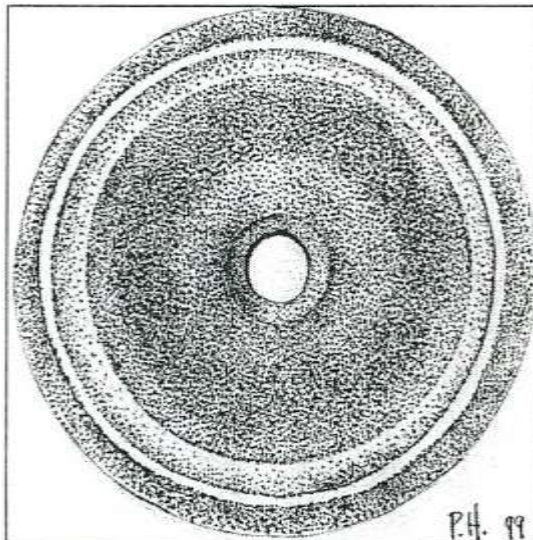
Hopefully the town will recognize the potential here and make this a millennium project. The shoreline area at the foot of Malone should be rehabilitated (it's now unsightly and rock-strewn - painful on bare feet) and the dive area itself delineated with a buoy line to keep watercraft away. A dive platform could also be constructed. Maybe there's grant money available for something like this.

I think it would also be a good idea to make that a 'no fishing' zone, restricting the anglers to using the area inside the breakwater. As it is, they're a messy bunch, leaving all kinds of garbage strewn over the breakwater.

The wreck of the old steamer Enterprise is out there at a still-secret location. It's time to have that site properly designated and protected as well, then open it up to divers.

With the new harbour, and this very attractive tourist attraction, Jackson's Point has a great opportunity here that should n't be passed up.

I invite anyone (especially members of council) to strap on the diving gear and have a look for themselves. No further convincing after that will be necessary.



References:

Georgina Advocate (1999) **Jackson's Pt.'s hidden treasure**, Friday, August 6, 1999, pp.6., Georina, Ontario.

Toronto Star (2017) **Archeology Beats Development**, G.T.A. Section (GT) pp. GT1 and GT2. Wednesday July 26, 2017, Toronto, Ontario.