



December 9, 2016

Mr. Emmett Yeo  
Councillor, Ward 2  
City of Kawartha Lakes

Dear Councillor Yeo:

We are writing to express our support for the volunteers and community members who are facing the possible closure of an important community hub in their villages.

The decision to close buildings that are so important to the fabric of our communities is one that comes with many ramifications and will have enduring long-term impacts on people's lives – our seniors, our children, our communities.

The businesses and community organizations in our rural villages are fighting each day to increase the quality of life for everyone in the communities. We are fighting to bring more resources to our communities so our people will have a vibrant, close-knit place in which to retire, to raise children, to start a business, to have fun, to learn new activities, and to come together.

There is a reason that the Ontario government offered a community capital funding program recently to renovate aging community centres and gathering spaces: there is proven data that speaks to the role that community gathering spaces have on the mental and physical health of our people and our communities. We understand that the City of Kawartha Lakes cannot maintain these buildings alone. The community is not asking you to. The community has shown over many years that they will partner with the City and take on much of the load to maintain and improve these buildings. They fundraise. They volunteer. They gather support. They care.

The buildings currently being considered for closure in our particular area for example – the Norland Old School Hall, the Coboconk Train Station, the Baddow Community Centre – serve a purpose in our communities that cannot be captured in a report that says people can gather somewhere else in these communities. The fact is, they will not be able to gather in the other available spaces that are quite simply too large for some gatherings, and too costly to rent for small groups. The pancake breakfasts and cake socials and craft sales and yoga classes that take place in these smaller spaces can't afford to use the larger community spaces, and as such, these gatherings will cease to exist. We are grateful for these larger spaces, and we need them in our communities as well, but that does not mean that they will serve all purposes. Smaller groups cannot afford the larger fees attached with the larger buildings.

It is difficult to measure – or place on a map – the heart and soul of a community, but we would argue that you might catch a glimpse of it if you looked at the community gathering spaces and the impassioned volunteers who have made it possible to have these assets in our communities until now. They have raised many thousands of dollars, they have used their own tools and skills to maintain the buildings, they have made a difference in their communities. There is a strong connection between volunteerism and the level of engagement people feel for their community. Without this connection, people leave for another community they can feel connected to. By closing these spaces – spaces that people have demonstrated through real action that they are cornerstones of our communities - Council

is telling these volunteers that all the time and energy they have invested for the benefit of the local communities - and the City as a whole - doesn't mean anything. There is no better way to put a halt to people meaningfully contributing to their communities in the future. And what would any of our communities be without the unbelievable amount of work that our volunteers do? We will be less.

In Canada, the non-profit and voluntary sector is an economic force that accounts for 8.5% of GDP. It would not be difficult to argue that in rural communities, that number could easily be tripled. It is a significant part of our local economy and key to the future success of our small communities.

We understand that the City of Kawartha Lakes needs to be fiscally responsible with expense budgets and asset management to ensure the health of our communities in the long term. This is not in question. But we do question the strategy of tearing the fabric of communities to make that happen.

On behalf of our members – business owners, community groups, churches, and community - we respectfully request that Council carefully review the true risks to our communities when making the decision to close our community gathering spaces. It is our opinion that the risks are too high. Please allow the community halls to remain open.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Wilson  
General Manager