

## Q&A WITH MICHELLE LAROSE FOR MAYOR – Nellie Lake Recreational vehicles (RV)

### Question:

A resident recently asked me to state my position with respect to the current Bylaw proposed to replace Bylaw 3710/23 as it relates to the use of Recreational vehicles (RV) in RR1 Zones as defined by the Municipality's Zoning Bylaw.

### Answer:

Municipal Council heard arguments both for and against the use of Recreational vehicles on property owned in the area around Nellie Lake that is within the Town of Iroquois Falls boundary.

Traditionally, most properties at Nellie Lake were used as seasonal cottages, with very few serving as year-round residences. Over time, however, there has been a gradual shift toward more permanent year-round occupancy. This change has resulted in increased residential development and greater reliance on private wells and septic systems.

In addition to the year-round residences, there has always been a significant seasonal component at Nellie Lake. Many property owners have traditionally enjoyed their cottage properties during the summer months, often welcoming family and friends who may stay in recreational vehicles or trailers while visiting or vacationing. This type of seasonal use has long been part of the character of Nellie Lake, allowing families and friends to enjoy unique quality of life and recreational opportunities that Northern Ontario has to offer. For many property owners, accommodating family and friends for temporary stays is part of the traditional cottage and lakefront experience and is quite different from the more densely developed environment commonly found in Southern Ontario.

To complicate things further, Nellie Lake is divided by Township boundaries that puts part of the lake in the Town of Iroquois Falls and part under the province which is considered "unorganized" property.

I have read all the available correspondence, attended recent council meetings in person or via Zoom and **have formulated the following observations and comments as a recommendation for moving forward:**

1. I would respectfully suggest **Council pause consideration of this issue** and return to the original direction provided regarding any proposed amendments to Bylaw 3710/23. Before proceeding with any changes, I believe a comprehensive review should be undertaken to fully consider all the significant issues associated with the use of recreational vehicles within all RR1 zones. In my view, a "one size fits all" approach may not be appropriate. Properties and areas designated as RR1 can vary considerably in terms of lot size, density, existing development, proximity to water, servicing, and environmental sensitivity. While the use of recreational vehicles may raise legitimate concerns regarding

overdevelopment or environmental impacts in certain locations, those same concerns may not exist, or may exist to a much lesser degree, in other RR1 areas.

Any proposed amendment(s) should therefore consider these differences and ensure that the resulting regulations are reasonable, evidence-based, and appropriate for the specific circumstances of the various RR1 areas within the municipality. The objective should be to protect Nellie Lake and the interests of neighbouring property owners to accommodate family and friends for reasonable, temporary recreational stays.

**2. What is the purpose of imposing an annual fee for recreational vehicles on properties with the RR1 zone, as proposed in the current Bylaw before Council?**

At a recent Council meeting, it was suggested that the fee could potentially be used to offset the costs associated with water quality testing. However, it is my understanding that the proposed fee was established without any clearly defined rationale or demonstrated correlation between the presence of recreational vehicles and the costs the Municipality is seeking to recover.

This raises an important question of fairness. If the purpose of the fee is to help fund water quality testing and protect the environmental health of Nellie Lake, why would the fee apply specifically to property owners who have additional Recreational vehicles on their properties, while not applying to owners of year-round residences, seasonal dwellings without Recreational vehicles, or properties located on the portion of the lake that is within the unorganized territory?

All property owners and users of the lake have the potential to affect its environmental health, regardless of whether a recreational vehicle is present on their property. **If water quality testing is considered necessary for the protection of Nellie Lake, then the responsibility for supporting that initiative should be approached in a fair, equitable, and transparent manner.**

In consultation with a colleague from the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR), there are avenues available for the Municipality and the MNR to work together to address further development of properties around the lake, including properties located within both municipal and unorganized territory. Such collaboration could help ensure that future development is addressed in a consistent and equitable manner, creating a more level playing field between the two areas of jurisdiction.

**3. The current Council, or the newly elected Council, should engage in discussions with the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP) regarding additional and ongoing water quality testing at Nellie Lake, as well as at other lakes within the Municipality's boundaries where seasonal and/or year-round residential development exists.** As part of these discussions, the Municipality should also explore the Ministry programs that are currently in place to perform water quality testing. There

may be the opportunity for MECP to conduct the testing on all the lakes in the area that have properties that have been developed.

To obtain a clear and reliable picture of the health and quality of the water, I believe it is important that the testing be conducted at various points throughout the year rather than relying solely on a one-time analysis. Seasonal testing would provide a better understanding of how water quality may fluctuate throughout the year, particularly during periods of increased occupancy and recreational activity around the lake. A consistent and scientifically based monitoring approach would also provide more meaningful information regarding phosphorus levels and other indicators of concern. Establishing a baseline for data and monitoring changes over time would allow the Municipality, the Province, and property owners to better understand the factors affecting the lake and make informed decisions regarding future development and measures necessary to protect the long-term health of the lakes.

4. **The current Council, or the newly elected Council, should engage in discussions with the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) regarding their respective roles and shared responsibility in addressing environmental impacts and future development at Nellie Lake.** A collaboration approach would help ensure that environmental protection and development considerations are addressed consistently across both municipal and unorganized areas surrounding the lake.

5. **Until these avenues have been fully explored, I would recommend that the Municipality implement a registry to monitor and track recreational vehicles located on properties at Nellie Lake, as well as other RR1 zoned areas, whether those properties have lake access or not.**

The purpose of the registry would be to gather information and meaningful statistics regarding the number, location, and use of recreational vehicles within RR1 zones. This information could then assist Council and staff in understanding a comprehensive, evidence-based review of the current Bylaw and determining whether amendments are necessary and appropriate for the different circumstances that may exist throughout the Municipality.

At this stage, I would recommend that the registry be implemented **without an annual fee**, as its primary purpose should be information gathering, monitoring, and supporting informed decision-making rather than generating municipal revenue.

6. **That Council further explores appropriate setback requirements from the high-water mark for recreational vehicles and any associated wastewater or sewage systems to help minimize the risk of accidental discharge, leaking, or other contamination that could adversely affect water quality.**

Any setback requirements should be based on applicable provincial regulations, the best environmental practices, and site-specific considerations. Once appropriate standards have been established, they could be incorporated into the applicable Bylaw and/or reflected in the Municipality's Zoning Bylaw to provide clear and consistent requirements for property owners.

- 7. That Council explore, in consultation with the appropriate local Health Unit and other relevant authorities, whether a review of existing septic systems and well installations at Nellie Lake (and others within the boundaries of Iroquois Falls) is warranted (organized and unorganized properties) to ensure compliance with applicable legislative and regulatory requirements.**

Such a review could also help identify whether existing systems present potential risks to the environmental health of the lakes and provide Council with additional information to support evidence-based decisions regarding future development and environmental protection.

At this point, I have not been privy of all the correspondence, information, or discussions that the current Council and municipal staff may have been involved in regarding this matter. Therefore, my observations, comments, and recommendations are based on information currently available, to me, conversations with residents who are both in favour of and opposed to the proposed changes to the current Bylaw, and consultation with Ministry staff.

I recognize that there may be additional information or considerations before Council of which I am not presently aware. My observations and recommendations are intended to contribute constructively to the discussion and to encourage a comprehensive, balanced, and evidence-based review of the proposed changes before a final decision is made.