

Editorials

The Great Gate Debate should be over

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Whether to open or not open the access gate between Upper Lorne Beach Road and Victoria Street in Inverhuron – that is the question.

The answer should be “no.”

However, Kincardine council has failed to resolve the issue and come to a definitive “no” on the question. Instead, for the past two years, the municipality has allowed the problem to flutter in the breeze like the snowflakes falling from the sky.

Because the bottom line is, nobody cares about this gate except in the winter time - when the roads are closed, when safety becomes paramount, and people get stuck at work or in Kincardine and they want to drive home.

That is the crux of the matter.

The answer should still be “no.”

If you read the history of this whole Great Gate Debate, you'll realize how ridiculous it really is.

A policy was drawn up 10 years ago to allow the gate to be opened for Category A workers at Bruce Power to get to the nuclear plant, and for emergency service vehicles to respond to calls, if Highway 21 and the B-line (Bruce County Road 23) were closed due to poor driving conditions. This was in direct response to a difficult winter when roads were closed

for days and nuclear operators were stuck at the plant without relief. In 2010, a delegation came to council asking that the gate be opened for the public to use as a safer route when the roads were closed. The answer was “no.”

In 2015, the debate came back to the council table, urging a change of heart, following yet another major Bruce County winter, fraught with road closures.

At that time, the chief administrative officer said the stakeholders, including the OPP, Bruce Power and municipal staff, had reviewed the 2008 policy, and all agreed that it worked well and should remain as written, as an emergency route for Bruce Power employee buses and emergency services.

Staff at that time, said the roadway, itself, is not designed for high volumes of traffic, particularly in the winter, because it is narrow and has blind corners; plus, the road width on Victoria Street does not allow vehicles to pass a plow or fire truck which could lead to a hazardous road blockage in adverse conditions.

Despite this information, at the meeting Sept. 2, 2015, council defeated a motion to confirm that policy, leaving the whole matter in limbo.

In a recorded vote, mayor Anne Eadie, and councillors Andrew White, Maureen Couture and Laura Haight were in favour, while deputy mayor Jacqueline Faubert, and councillors Mike Leggett, Randy Roppel, Gordon Campbell and Linda McKee were against.

During that debate, Faubert asked again why the gate couldn't be opened when just Highway 21 was closed. She wanted to explore the option of fixing the road, the cost and the liability. Couture said people should just use the B-line if the highway is closed, or stay at home.

The cost and the need were debated, and then the motion was defeated, leaving the original 2008 policy in place, and no direction for staff.

Fast-forward to Wednesday night (Jan. 24) at the council meeting when Campbell requested this issue come back for even more debate. He said there should be public access through the gate in the winter, particularly since the north end of the B-line is so treacherous.

Most of council agreed it needed to re-read the information on this and perhaps get a staff report.

For what?

Enough time has been wasted on this. If council hadn't dropped the ball two years ago, the debate could have been held then – with a staff report, if you must, regarding the costs related to fixing up the roadway on either side of the gate.

You don't have to be an engineer to know that a rural road through a residential neighbourhood is going to require millions of dollars to fix up to proper standards for thousands of vehicles to use.

You don't have to be a soothsayer to know that if you open the gate and allow public access during the winter, vehicles are going to get stuck in the snow along that section of road, then you have no emergency access

for either Bruce Power buses or fire trucks.

You don't have to be a genius to know that this is a bad idea. The people who live along that road don't want it. The police, fire, ambulance, and Bruce Power don't want it. And, the motorists don't need it.

If council truly believes in safety first, it will leave that emergency access alone, and put an end to this insufferable Great Gate Debate, once and for all.