

GASPE'S 2024 BUDGET: LM Wind Power saves the day

NELSON SERGERIE
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

GASPÉ - LM Wind Power saves Gaspé taxpayers from a steep tax hike in 2024, by paying \$2.2 million into the town's coffers from the plant expansion completed in 2022.

The budget saw strong growth of 11.6%, reaching \$36.2 million due to inflation.

"It's lucky that LM Wind Power is there. LM brings us \$2.2 million in new taxes each year. We believed in it, and today it's paying off, and that's so much the better. Because if LM did not enter the assessment roll, the increase in the tax bill would have been 26% this year. Yes, we can say thank you to them which allows us not to cut services while keeping an increase in the tax bill below inflation," says the mayor, Daniel Côté.

The Town can use \$1 million in the undistributed accumulated surplus of \$6.3 million to balance the 2024 budget and will not need the \$1.7 million announced in the 2023 budget to complete the fiscal year.

"We managed to reduce the increase in the tax bill. If we had not had a surplus, we

would have increased our tax bill by just over 7%. By taking \$1 million from the surplus, we managed to bring that down to 3.8%," says the elected official. The new assessment role increases by 30.2% - 35.9% in the residential sector - to reach \$2.35 billion, an increase of \$500 million on the last role.

To balance the tax bill, the base rate is reduced from \$0.98 to \$0.746 per \$100 of assessment, a reduction of 31.5%.

On the other hand, taxes for services such as water and sewer each increase by \$20, the collection of residual materials by \$15, and the collection of septic tank sludge also increases by \$15.

In total, the tax bill is experiencing an average growth of 3.8%, which is less than inflation.

However, the average increase varies from one district to another because the assessment roll increases on average by 44.3% in district 3 (Anse-au-Griffon, Cap-des-Rosiers, Cap-aux-Os and Rosebridge) and 41.5% in district 1 (Anse-à-Valleau, Pointe-Jaune, Saint-Maurice-de-l'Échouerie and Petit-Cap).

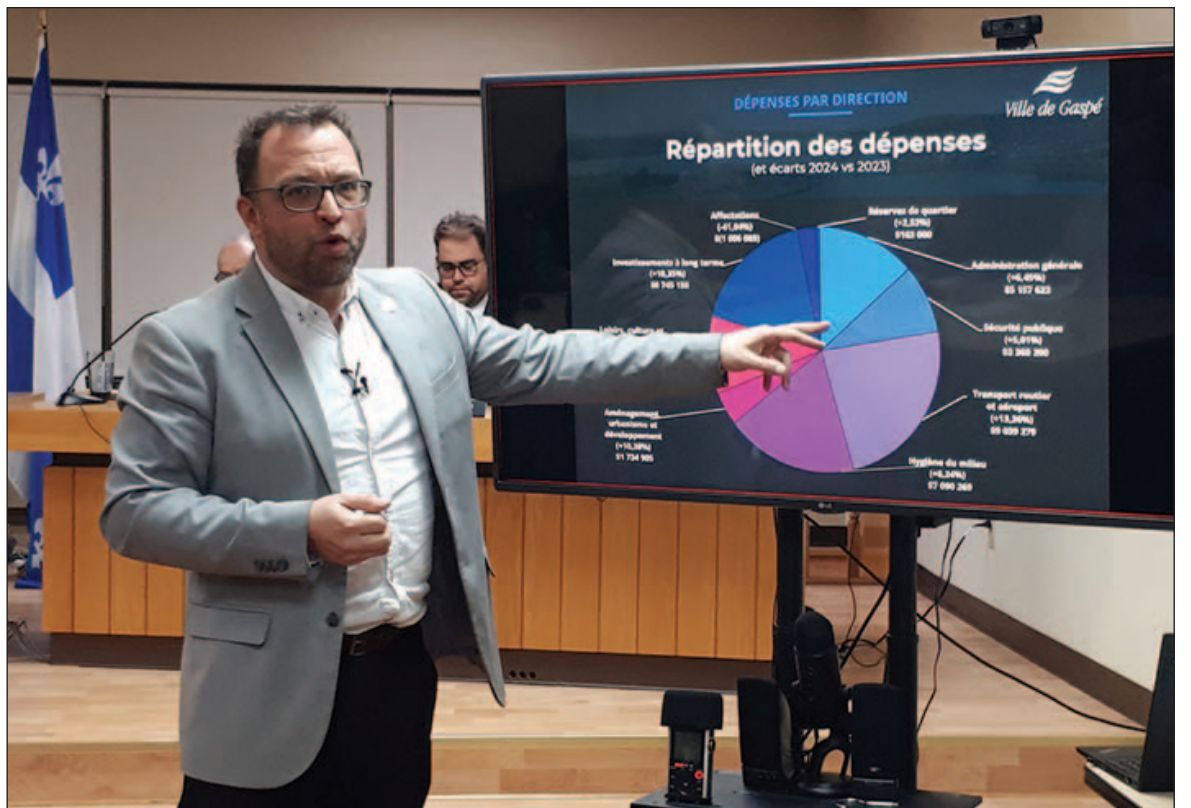


Photo: N. Sergerie

The mayor of Gaspé, Daniel Côté, presents the budget to citizens

The lowest growth is in district 2 (Rivière-au-Renard) with an increase in the average assessment of 25.5%.

For a residence valued at \$238,500 (average assessment), this will represent an increase of \$89.78 for the year.

Due to the new role, 38.4% of residences will see a reduction in their tax bill.

The variations fluctuate between -14% and +38%.

The rise in interest rates adds \$680,000 in costs for the town, which will have to pay an additional amount on a stable net debt of \$48 million.

The other sectors which increased the most are the management of residual materials (\$383,685), the indexation of

snow removal contracts (\$225,921), the increase in the price of fuel (\$50,000), and maintenance costs of the vehicle fleet and buildings (\$285,545).

"One-quarter is attached to human resources services, one-quarter is attached to contracts

Cont'd on page 8

New Richmond tax payers to face a 2.7% increase in 2024

GILLES GAGNÉ

NEW RICHMOND - The owners of an average-valued home in New Richmond will see a 2.7% tax increase in 2024, while business owners face a 4.3% increase, according to the municipal budget adopted on December 18 by the town council.

The expenditure and revenue forecasting exercise was conducted against the backdrop of inflation in New Richmond, echoing the context of 2023. Increases in machinery maintenance and construction costs, as well as important hikes for the treatment of residual materials are notable contributors to the upward trend in budgetary items.

Mayor Éric Dubé finds re-

lief in the fact that the increase is limited to 2.7% on residential buildings, considering the challenges of managing high bills that go hand in hand with providing services to the population.

Mayor Dubé points out that considering the taxpayer's capacity to pay has a limit; wealth must be created to continue the town's development. He is proud that his municipal team was able to put up a strategy encouraging the construction of new housing units, which will generate new municipal revenues.

"We were visionaries because we were able to set up a program providing \$15,000 per new door (built). We sort of groomed the trail for the rest of the province. We are

proud of that. This program will add twenty-some new residences to the town (in 2024). It will bring in new people. It is also good for our businesses," explains Mr. Dubé.

He sees the same advantages for the industrial sector. "We just have to take a look at the industrial park, at all of the new constructions over the last years. We accompanied Eurovia to make sure that they would land their (asphalt plant) project. We remain an economy-oriented town. It is in our DNA, in our history," adds Éric Dubé.

The last three-year assessment carried out by an independent firm supports Mayor Dubé's perspective. New Richmond's total municipal

value, which means the total tax value of the properties situated within its municipal limits, has increased from \$376,471,000 three years ago to \$486,134,000 in 2024, a jump of nearly \$110 million, marking a 29% increase.

As a result, the tax rate will decrease in 2024, compared to that of 2023, says mayor Dubé.

"Consequently, the residential real estate tax rate will decrease from \$1,1947 to \$0,8991 per \$100 of assessment, a decrease of \$0,296. This same rate is applicable to the agriculture and forestry categories. The non-residential (business) rate will decrease from \$2,3657 to \$1,9711 per \$100 of assessment, a decrease of \$0,395. In

summary, these rate changes caused by new real estate values signify that the real estate taxes for a residence will increase by an average of 2.7% and by 4.3% for a business. In the current context, we consider that these increases are reasonable in function of the services we offer," he stresses.

The municipal administration has also applied a tool granted by the Minister of Municipal Affairs to facilitate property access by increasing the tax rate on vacant serviced lots to a maximum of two times the basic rate, up from 1.36 times the basic rate in 2023.

"The corresponding revenues are not enormous, but

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Several murder trials are likely to take place in 2024 in the Gaspé Peninsula

GILLES GAGNÉ

NEW CARLISLE – An unusually high number of murder and manslaughter trials will take place in the Gaspé Peninsula throughout 2024 and possibly into 2025. The last three years have been just as unusually active regarding violent crimes in the region.

One trial will be held in the short term, while some others are likely to take place in the medium term, barring a plea of guilty that will still require representations on sentence and a judge’s decision on that issue.

Brandon Metallic

The first murder case of the year is set to commence on January 15 at the New Carlisle courthouse. Brandon Metallic, 32, from Listuguj, faces charges related to the non-premeditated murder of a young man in his twenties and the manslaughter of a young girl that occurred on May 15, 2021. The crimes were committed in a Listuguj house around lunchtime.

He was initially charged with two non-premeditated murders until the June 2022 preliminary hearings, but that charge was amended due to criminal prosecutor, Florence Frappier-Routhier, admitting that she did not have enough evidence to support two non-premeditated murder cases.

Brandon Metallic underwent a thorough psychiatric evaluation and treatments to make him fit to stand his Superior Court trial. It explains, in part, why the trial will take place 32 months after the May 2021 event. He will represent himself in this trial but a lawyer, Ariane Cayer, was designated as a friend of the court and helps the accused with the paperwork stemming from the court case. Five weeks have been reserved for the trial. Some requests and points of law will be dealt with before the selection of the jury. The identity of the two victims is protected by a publication ban.

The double murder of Rivière-au-Renard

Simon Dufort-Chouinard and his father, Marc-Jules Chouinard, will return to court in the coming months. The two Rivière-au-Renard residents aged 19 and 48, are facing justice following the collision that occurred on May 10 in their community, a sector of the



Photo: G. Gagné

The first murder case of the year will be heard at the New Carlisle courthouse, starting on January 15.

town of Gaspé. The collision claimed the lives of two young men, Dylan Samuel-Francoeur, 18, and Gabriel Noël, 19.

Simon Dufort-Chouinard faces charges of premeditated murder on Gabriel Noël and non-premeditated murder on Dylan Samuel-Francoeur. The accused remains detained during legal proceedings. He will be back in court on January 10.

The two cases will be heard at the Percé courthouse, where many relatives of the two victims converged during the various hearings. His father was released on November 20. He faces two counts of manslaughter. They are added to the charges of attempted murder and dangerous driving that were already laid against him previously. Procedures continue on January 22 in this case.

Lisette Hautcoeur’s trial dates to be determined

At the end of three days of preliminary hearings held in November, Lisette Hautcoeur, 59, from Chandler, was summoned to eventually stand trial for the murder of Richard Alard. The 64-year-old man was found dead in his Chandler home on July 16, 2022. Lisette Hautcoeur will be back in court on March 4. The dates of her trial could be set at this time. The proceedings will take place at the Percé courthouse.

Keven Labrie: a file to follow in the spring

Keven Labrie, 38, is accused of the murder of Jean-Philippe Bélanger. The actions with which he is accused were allegedly committed on May 3, 2022. That day, Jean-Philippe Bélanger, 42, was stabbed in an

apartment on 7th Street West in Sainte-Anne-des-Monts. The man died from his injuries a few days after the incident.

Keven Labrie underwent his preliminary hearing at the Sainte-Anne-des-Monts courthouse in May 2023. The accused will return to court on March 4.

The Amqui tragedy court case

Even if the case occurred in the Lower Saint Lawrence region, the March 13 Amqui tragedy shocked the whole province and claimed the life

of a man who was born and raised in Gaspé, Simon-Guil- laume Bourget. The suspect, Steeve Gagnon, will undergo his preliminary hearing on January 15 at the Amqui court- house. Around thirty witnesses will be heard during the five days of hearings scheduled.

The 39-year-old defendant faces a total of 14 charges, in- cluding three for premeditated murder. He allegedly used his vehicle to hit pedestrians walk- ing along Highway 132 in downtown Amqui around 3 p.m. on a Monday afternoon.

The vehicle hit 11 pedestri-

ans. Three men, Simon-Guil- laume Bourget, Gérald Charest and Jean Lafrenière, lost their lives. These events shook all of Quebec. Steeve Gagnon comes from the neighbouring village of Saint-Léon-le-Grand, just south of Amqui.

Karine Rioux to know her sentence soon

Another court file, of drink- ing and driving causing death, will be concluded at the begin- ning of the year as Karine Rioux, 36, from Gaspé who entered a plea of guilty on Sep- tember 28 to two counts of im- paired driving in connection with the death of Patrick Dono- van, 63, from Gaspé. She will come back to the Percé court- house on January 12 for her sentencing. Mr. Donovan was walking on Boulevard de Gaspé when he was struck on December 16, 2021, by the car driven by the accused. The al- cohol test showed a level of 90 mg/100 ml, or 10 mg above the permitted limit.

The 36-year-old woman will return to court on January 12 for sentencing. Although she is potentially liable to life imprisonment, she has no criminal record, a factor that will likely be taken into ac- count by the judge, especially considering her plea of guilty.

No charges for individual accused of harassing Chandler mayor

NELSON SERGERIE
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

CHANDLER - No charges will be filed against the indi- vidual who threatened Gilles Daraîche, the mayor of Chan- dler, on November 6.

After analyzing the file, the Directorate of Criminal and Penal Prosecutions found in- sufficient evidence to bring the case to court.

The conditions imposed on the defendant since his arrest have been lifted.

“It’s very disappointing. When someone says: “I’m going to find you, I’m going to look. You won’t be able to go anywhere anymore. I’m going to be behind you all the time. Watch yourself.” It’s intimi- dating. This is harassment. I took it seriously. But appar- ently someone has to put a gun to your head or a knife to your throat for it to be taken seri- ously,” says Mayor Gilles Daraîche bluntly.



Photo: N. Sergerie

The mayor of Chandler, Gilles Daraîche

The past year has not been easy for elected officials who have been victims of deroga- tory comments on social net- works.

“It’s wasted energy and time,” says the elected official.

Mayor Daraîche provided the Sûreté du Québec police officers the text messages ex- changed with the individual between 7:45 a.m. and 9:30

a.m on November 6.

“It was written in black and white,” says the mayor, wondering what will happen next.

“Who is going to want to be mayor or councillor in Chandler? We have an ex- tremely difficult task. Every- one says anything on social networks,” concludes the mayor.

A historic grapnel is stolen from the Bourg de Pabos

NELSON SERGERIE
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

CHANDLER - The Bourg de Pabos archaeological site is seeking assistance in locating a stolen late 19th-century artifact that holds significance relating the history of the King Brothers.

The two-foot grapple, which was tethered and on display at the site for several years, has vanished. The King Brothers mill, dismantled in 1913, was the predecessor to the Gaspésia pulp and paper mill.

"It appears to have been stolen or taken home by a visitor or someone passing by the site. It's theft to leave with artifacts like that. It's also detrimental to the interpretation of history and the heritage we're trying to preserve," explains Director Elsa Pépin.

Ms. Pépin is offering the culprit an opportunity to return the object as quickly as possible.

"It was an object used to in-

terpret the forestry industry during the King Brothers era. It's also part of a new interpretive activity for children in the spring, called Seek and Find'," says the director.

The disappearance of the artifact likely occurred towards the end of the tourist season.

Surveillance camera recordings will be analyzed. "We are going to take steps to check if we see anyone running away with such a large object. It shouldn't be too difficult to locate. But we want to give the person a chance to return it," she says. If the item is not returned, the Sûreté du Québec could be contacted.

According to the Quebec Ministry of Culture website, the Pabos archaeological site was a permanent fishing post and the administrative centre of an important area of the Gaspésie occupied from 1729 to 1758.

The site includes various remains of the French Regime,

including the seigneurial house, fishermen's huts and a store, potential remains of a cemetery, chapel, outbuildings, and fishing facilities, as well as the land.

Traces of the English period and industrial remains, including the ruins of a mill, are also present on the site, as well as material evidence of the Aboriginal presence.

The perimeter of the site covers two distinct geographical elements, namely the Beau Séjour island, located in the centre of the bay of Grand Pabos, and the end of the point of Pabos Mills, which separates the bay of Grand Pabos and the Gulf of Saint-Lawrence.

Both areas are partially forested today. The Pabos archaeological site is part of the municipality of Chandler.

This property is classified as a heritage site, and protection applies to the land and what is on it.

Chandler raises taxes

NELSON SERGERIE
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

CHANDLER - Chandler taxpayers will have to pay more in 2024, with average residential tax bills set to rise by 4.5%. The base rate increases by two cents to \$0.87 per \$100 of valuation.

The rates for the collection of residual materials increase by \$35, those for the aqueduct by \$25, by \$21 for the sewers and \$6 for the loan regulations linked to the paving of the streets.

"We explain it by a loss of \$340,000 in equalization (payments). If we summarize expenses and income, we lose \$500,000. It was necessary to increase it by 2 cents. Compared to other municipalities, we do not have large businesses that provide us with \$2 million in taxes. This has an impact," explains the pro-mayor, Bruno-Pierre Godbout, referring to the entry of \$2.2 million for the next year from the LM Wind Power plant into the municipal taxation of the Town of Gaspé.

To balance the 2024 budget, the Town of Chandler had to draw \$80,000 from the unallocated surplus, which was \$500,000 for an overall budget of \$13.6 million.

The impact will be felt differently depending on the



Photo: N. Sergerie

The pro-mayor, Bruno-Pierre Godbout, presented the municipal budget on December 19.

neighbourhood, as the rate is impacted by sector debts.

For example, a \$200,000 home in Chandler will see its tax bill increase by 0.17%. The same house in Saint-François will see its bill increase by 4.04%, 4.25% in Pabos Mills, 4.32% in Pabos, and 6.36% in Newport.

The municipality will not borrow money in 2024 to carry out its projects submitted for \$2.1 million.

The three-year capital plan for 2024, 2025 and 2026 amounts to \$18.3 million.

The largest entry is the \$12 million planned for water purification in the Newport district, a project that has been on the table for several years.

"Recently, we had preliminary studies, and we have things that will allow us to submit a file for a subsidy request in 2024. It could be done around 2025," states the pro-mayor, who is also a councillor for the Newport district.

Chandler is in the final year of its assessment role in 2024.

"We see the real estate market with residential sales at double the evaluation. The role will probably increase in 2024. We will wait before deciding," mentions Mr. Godbout.

The pro-mayor presented the 2024 budget in place of the mayor, Gilles Daraîche, who was absent for personal reasons.

Police report

The search conducted on December 28 and 29 to locate Magella Langlais, 72, from Cloridorme, sadly concluded with the discovery of his body. Mr. Langlais was last seen by friends driving his all-terrain vehicle on the morning of December 28 around 8:30 a.m. near Highway 132, heading towards the wooded area of Cloridorme. When Mr. Langlais did not return by nightfall, family members sought assistance from the Sûreté du Québec. Volunteers and police officers initiated a search, and on the morning of December 29, shortly after 11 a.m., Mr. Langlais' body was discovered in an isolated area of Cloridorme by a volunteer. Initial observations suggest a fatal accident involving his all-terrain vehicle, and an ongoing investigation aims to ascertain the exact causes and circumstances leading to the victim's death.

Sûreté du Québec's major crime investigation squad based in Chandler was recently seeking the public's cooperation in locating two suspects involved in a break-in and assault case in Percé. The police were called shortly before noon on December 18 regarding a break-in followed by an assault in a residence in the area of Baril Street in Percé. The suspects left the scene before the police arrived. The alleged victim, sustained minor injuries and had to be transported to the Chandler hospital. The investigation identified the alleged perpetrators as Jonathan Racette, 29, and Michael Bourque, 28, both from the greater Chandler area. Despite efforts up until January 4, the suspects who were subject to an arrest warrant, had not been located. However, on the morning of January 4, Jonathan Racette turned himself in at the Sûreté du Québec detachment of Chandler. He was slated to appear in court as the SPEC reached its deadline. As for Michael Bourque, he has still not yet been located as the SPEC was reaching its January 5 deadline. Any information that could help locate Michael Bourque can be communicated, confidentially, to the Criminal Information Centre of the Sûreté du Québec at 1 800 659-4264.



Photo: Courtesy of the Sûreté du Québec

During the Christmas break, police officers from the Sûreté du Québec in the Haute-Gaspésie MRC made three drug-related arrests following vehicle interceptions related to highway safety code offenses. On the evening of December 26, a 49-year-old man was arrested and released pending a commitment to appear in court eventually for further proceedings. He could face a charge of methamphetamine possession. During the night of December 26 to 27, two other men, aged 52 and 55, were arrested and released. They could soon face charges of cocaine possession. Their identities will only be released once they are formally charged.

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Gilles Gagné

Commentary

Year 2024 will be full of political sparks

People who like politics are unlikely to get bored in 2024, at the federal and provincial levels. While there’s much to delve into at both levels, let’s begin this week with a focus of federal politics.

The close of 2023 brought a slightly positive note for Justin Trudeau’s Liberal Party government reducing the Conservative Party’s lead in surveys from a whopping 18% to 10% in just one month. This shift was more a result of Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre’s bully manners than anything else.

However, despite Mr. Poilievre’s new look, manifesting through the removal of his glasses and a more laid back style of clothing, if he keeps barking insults and uttering unfounded information like Donald Trump, the Conservative Party leader will keep sliding in the public opinion.

For a number of reasons, a federal election in 2024 seem unlikely. Prime Minister Trudeau, beside hoping for Mr. Poilievre’s blunders, wants to see if the measures taken over the last two years to counter inflation, like raising interest rates, will have the expected effect. The inflation rate has effectively gone down in 2023, as it was about cut in half compared to the peak of 2021-2022, and if it keeps plummeting, the Bank of Canada will, therefore, lower its policy interest rate, which will likely have a beneficial effect on people’s mortgages.

A year will likely be needed before citizens take advantage of those measures, and for the Liberal Party to rise in the polls.

The New Democratic Party, which has been supporting the Justin Trudeau minority government since the October 2021 election, doesn’t have much interest in triggering an early election either. Jagmeet Singh’s party has never had that kind of influence on a reigning party, especially in social and health policies. The finances of the NDP, a cause of worry for almost a decade, might have improved a bit, but an additional year, it is hoped by the party brass, will benefit some more to the party if the election is only called for 2025. An additional year might give Mr. Singh a chance to capitalize on the influence he has had on certain decisions made by the Liberal Party government.

American politics will likely play a role in Canada

There will be an election in the United States in November 2024. If former Republican Party president, Donald Trump, is a candidate, still not a sure shot considering his legal problems, and if he wins, that outcome might generate a significant backlash in Canada.

NOTICE OF CLOSURE OF INVENTORY

Notice is hereby given that, in accordance with the Civil Code of Quebec, the closure of inventory was made in regard to the succession of James Allen CHICOINE, born on March 30, 1944, during his lifetime domiciled and residing at 1279 Valiquette Avenue, Verdun, Quebec, H4H 2E6, and died on March 11, 2023, in Montreal, Quebec.

This inventory may be consulted by any interested party, at the office of Mtre. Nadia DE RIGGI, Notary, located at 6150 de Monkland Avenue, Montreal, Quebec, H4B 1G4.

Pierre Poilievre’s Trump-like demeanor might win him some support in the most radical cross-sections of Conservative Party’s electorate. Still, his success in an election would depend on garnering support from politically moderate citizens. Generally, Canadians are not inclined to embrace a platform similar to that of Donald Trump or someone with comparable views.

While Justin Trudeau likely does not hope for Donald Trump’s victory in November and as long as the former American president continues expressing radical views that make him look like a divisive figure and as long as Pierre Poilievre aligns himself with such positions, the Liberal Party is likely to gain favour among Canadians voters.

The Bloc Québécois is looking for stakes

While often a disruptive force in federal politics, the Bloc québécois remained somewhat unnoticed in 2023. However, anticipation builds for its leader, Yves-François Blanchet, to stir things up in 2024.

Mr. Blanchet is a first-class debater. He knows it though, which leads him to make moves driven by over-confidence and a tendency to act like a bully.

The Bloc québécois was almost dead prior to Mr. Blanchet’s win in the January 2019 leadership race that ended with the withdrawal of his only opponent. The Bloc, which in the 1993 and 2004 polls won as many as 54 of Quebec’s 75 House of Commons seats, was down to four seats in 2011, and 10 in 2015. Under the leadership of Martine Ouellet in 2017-2018, seven of the party’s 10 Members of Parliament pulled out of the caucus to contest her leadership, or lack thereof. Against all odds, the Bloc québécois came back strongly in 2019 with 32 seats, the same number won in 2021.

Despite Mr. Blanchet’s stronghold, the party appears to be searching for a cause that aligns with its Quebec independence goal.

In a way, the fact that Pierre Poilievre started attacking the Bloc Québécois and Yves-François Blanchet directly over recent months might rejuvenate the latter’s fighting spirit. Mr. Poilievre doesn’t seem to understand that he is challenging the Bloc québécois without a potent purpose might play against him. The Bloc has repeatedly been perceived by Quebecers, whether they are sovereigntists or not, as the best party to defend their interests at the federal level, given the repeated gaffes of all the other parties when understanding Quebec unique concerns.

In 2024, Bloc Québécois is expected to maintain its long-standing strategy, which is to analyze each issue in terms of Quebec’s interests. It could, therefore, support the Liberal Party according to a piecemeal strategy, by avoiding praising Justin Trudeau, who needs some support in Quebec to eventually win over Pierre Poilievre.

Complicated? It is indeed. Since the 2011 election, the

Bloc québécois was weak when the Parti québécois (PQ) was strong, and the other way around. The 2023 rejuvenation of the PQ might spell hardship for the Bloc, come the next federal election. Quebecers might be tempted to give strong support to the Liberal Party in an attempt to avoid a government led by Pierre Poilievre, whose level of trust is weak in La belle Province, except in Quebec City and the adjacent south shore.

Spring 2025 at the earliest

The likelihood of a federal election before the spring of 2025 appears low. The period following the early spring budget could favour an election if the economy strongly recovers from its current slump.

As for the leadership of the Liberal party in a potential election, Justin Trudeau remains committed to keeping his position over recent months. With no apparent successor, Trudeau’s effective campaigning skills and fighting spirit make him a preferred candidate. His fighting instinct makes him want to measure himself against Pierre Poilievre. As time passes, the Liberal Party brass is not too keen on the risk of throwing an inexperienced leader into a race.

It is a bit early to determine what the ballot question will be. Mr. Trudeau probably wants to make it a question for the future of the country, a question of vision. Mr. Poilievre will likely choose an abrasive issue, like the carbon tax. Yves-François Blanchet must identify a defining issue, like Jagmeet Singh.

The economy, with housing and the cost of living dominating the scene, will likely obsess the party leaders. The next federal budget is consequently one to watch, as Justin Trudeau will want to show that he is not the spend-thrift Pierre Poilievre portrays him to be.

Yes, the year 2024 promises to be full of sparks.

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New Richmond mayor sends another urgent message regarding Pin rouge

The Town needs help

GILLES GAGNÉ

NEW RICHMOND – For the second consecutive year, the mayor of New Richmond, Éric Dubé, raises concern about the future of the Parc régional de la Petite-Cascapédia, which includes the Pin rouge ski centre. That future appears bleak if the debt load of the regional park is solely paid for by the municipal administration, says Mr. Dubé.

The accumulated debt of the regional park now reaches \$2.9 million. Since the 2022-2023 interest rate gradual increase, the Town of Richmond, which is paying the ski centre's debt, is no longer able to pay the interest fee and part of the capital with an annual amount of \$150,000.

Mayor Dubé expressed his concern during his annual budget speech, presented on December 18. However, in an attempt to be balanced in his statement, he also mentions now that the Pin rouge context is experienced by dozens of ski centres in Quebec.

“We expect some development between now and the end of March. Other ski centres have a regional calling, like Mount Orford, Saint-Mathieu (near Trois-Pistoles) and Val d’Irène in the Mata-pedia Valley. However, Pin rouge is part of an organization called a regional park, but the Town of New Richmond is the only entity paying the bill, and Pin rouge is not even within our municipal limits,” stresses Éric Dubé.

He has been in contact with the Quebec Association des centres de ski and its director, Yves Juneau. They agree on the point that no region in Quebec can afford to lose a development tool like a ski centre of Pin rouge's caliber.

“If we close it, the cost of reopening it would be prohibitive. We would never have the means of reopening it,” sums up Mayor Dubé.

Town councillor, Jean Cormier, an avid skier, stresses that rebuilding a facility like Pin rouge would cost tens of millions of dollars nowadays. Its cost when it was built in 1989-1990 amounted to a tad above \$3 million. Many improvements have been added over the last 34 years.

Interest fees

A year ago, the Town of New Richmond revealed that it had increased its contribution to Pin rouge from \$150,000 in 2022 to \$175,000 for 2023, since the policy interest rate had gone from 0.25% to 3.50% during the previous year. The sum of \$175,000 only covered interest fees in 2023.

In 2023, the policy interest rate went up again and reached 5%. The \$2.9 million accumulated debt of Pin rouge is not a loan but a credit line, which warrants an interest rate considerably higher than the policy rate.

“We are currently paying \$225,000 annually, just in interest. Before 2022, we were paying half-and-half between capital and interest,” explains Éric Dubé.

Prior to the 2014 budget, weeks after Mr. Dubé was elected mayor, the regional park debt stood at \$3.5 million. It means that \$600,000 was reimbursed between 2014 and mid-2022 inclusively. Officially, the Town of New Richmond has until 2050 to pay that debt back but that is only on paper, stresses Éric Dubé.

“The interest rate will go down at one point. We cannot negotiate a better interest rate with Desjardins under current conditions. The municipalities have a triple A credit rating. Overall, it is too early to draw a scenario of what will happen. However, the status quo is unbearable. We must come up with a new model. We all have an interest in its (Pin rouge) survival,” he

comments, referring to the impact it has on labour recruitment.

In his budget speech, Éric Dubé also summed up the situation. “I cannot believe that the region would not mobilize to ensure its (Pin rouge) continued existence. If we wish to stand out as a region, if we wish to offer the best to our citizens, if we wish to draw professionals here and retain our current workforce, we must sit down and ensure the future of this facility. Many other regions have done exactly the same thing with a great deal of success. Today we must see beyond our simple services and local needs, because tomorrow will be too late.”

A survival committee is currently working on medium to long-term solutions that would ensure the future of the ski centre.

The Parc régional de la Petite-Cascapédia also includes the 32 cottages of Pin rouge and the Taylor Point campground. The two latter facilities are usually profitable. The total budget of the regional park reaches \$1.9 million annually and provides work to 40 people during its peak periods.

Like last year, when the sharing of the regional park costs was raised, Éric Dubé expects other mayors to react to his plea.

“We will hear my colleagues raise the point that they, too, must manage facilities with a regional calling. The discussion must start at one point though,” he concludes.



Gesgapegiag celebrates National Ribbon Skirt Day

GILLES GAGNÉ

GESGAPEGIAG – On January 4, twenty-six women from Gesgapegiag marked National Ribbon Skirt Day by gathering at the Mawiommi premise, adorned in their traditional regalia. Elder William Jerome joined them for the photo, representing a celebration that spanned three generations.

The midday gathering, held between noon and 1 p.m., included individual photos of the women taken by Kayla Caplin before the group picture. This occasion marked the second such national day following the adoption by the House of Commons of Bill S-219 in December 2022, initially proposed by Senator Mary Jane McCallum.

The origin of that special day goes back to December

2020 when Isabella Kulak, a Saskatchewan Native, attended a "formal day" at her school in Kamsack, wearing a ribbon skirt. A school employee told her she should have worn something more formal. The school administration later apologized to the family and the Cote First Nation for the staff member's statement. Isabella's story triggered an outcry in many Indigenous communities, leading to the establishment of National Ribbon Skirt Day.

On January 4, 2021, people across the communities gathered to walk in ribbon skirts to support Isabella.

Jeannette Maltan Martin shared the details of this story on January 4 in Gesgapegiag with some people from the neighbouring communities in attendance.

NEW RICHMOND TAX:

Cont'd from cover

we hope to stimulate the sale of vacant lots serviced by the water and sewerage network so that there will be new constructions,” points out Mr. Dubé, who commends the members of the municipal council for their work during the preparation of the 2024 budget.

In 2024, the owner of an average house with all the

services will receive a bill of \$2,859,58, compared to \$2,762.41 in 2023. It represents a \$97.17 increase, including \$43 for the recyclable and residual materials tariff, raising the percentage of the total from 2.7% to 3.5%.

The total budget for the Town of New Richmond will reach \$9,815,038 in 2024, compared to \$9,245,292 a year ago, reflecting an increase of \$569,746.

Hope Town Sports Club December activities

Linda MacWhirter

HOPETOWN: The Hope Town Sports Club concluded its December activities with two memorable events for the residents of Hope Town and beyond.

For the past two decades, the Hope Town sports club has hosted activities and lunch at the Hope Town Community Center and the Club Optimiste organized Santa's arrival. However, due to unforeseen circumstances this year, the Community Centre was unavailable on Sunday, December 17. Undeterred, the three municipalities of Hope Town, Saint Godefroi and Shi-

gawake decided to join forces, relocating the festivities to the Club Optimiste in Saint Godefroi, a first in the event's history.

The activity began at 10:30 a.m. with an array of games for children organized by dedicated volunteers. While the children were busy, members of the Club Optimiste were busy preparing lunch. Lunch was served to over 150 children and adults in attendance.

Santa Claus made a grand entrance at 12:45 p.m. distributing chocolates to 92 excited children. Three stuffed animals were donated by the Club Optimiste, and four \$10 gift cards were donated from each of the

following, Municipality of Shigawake, Municipalité de Saint Godefroi, Municipality of Hope Town and Hope Town Sports Club, making a total of 19 prizes drawn.

The Club Optimiste of Saint Godefroi played a crucial role by covering the cost of the food and chocolate Santa gave to the children. The Hope Town Sports Club members and Rachel MacWhirter made the desserts and Laurette Grenier took pictures during the activity. The turnout was amazing and a great time was had by all. Many positive comments were made throughout the successful event.

Continuing their longstand-

ing tradition, Sports Club members dedicated their efforts on Sunday, December 24, to prepare and deliver fruit plates to residents aged 60 and over. Sports club members, Joanne Ross, Leon Dubé, Linda MacWhirter and Nancy MacWhirter came together to assemble and deliver 130 fruit plates. Deliveries began at 10:30 a.m. and continued to 2 p.m. Chauffeur Leon Dubé and his two elves Joanne and Linda brought smiles and gratitude from the residents, reinforcing the Sports Club's commitment to spreading holiday cheer.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to all

The Innergex-Mi'gmaqs wind farm project is proceeding without opposition

● GILLES GAGNÉ

RISTIGOUCHE-SUD-EST – The Mesgi'g Ugu's'n 2 wind farm project, planned for commissioning in December 2026 in the Escuminac back-country, is progressing virtually without opposition as evidenced by an information meeting held by the promoters on December 19 in Restigouche-Sud-Est.

The \$250 million project led by the firm Innergex and the Migmawei Mawiomi Business Corporation plans to add 102.24 megawatts of electricity to Hydro-Québec's wind portfolio. The wind farm may feature a maximum of 24 wind turbines and potentially as few as 17, depending on the turbine sizes chosen by future owners.

The wind turbines will be erected 22 kilometres from Highway 132, in a forested highlands far from salmon rivers and with very few streams. The closest community, L'Alverne, a part of Pointe-à-la-Croix situated about 15 kilometres from Highway 132, is located several kilometres from the nearest wind turbines.

The new towers will also be built in the middle of an existing wind farm, also called Mesgi'g Ugu's'n, the first of its name, featuring 47 wind turbines generating 150 megawatts and operational since December 2016. Mesgi'g Ugu's'n means "big wind" in Mi'gmaq.

Luc Leblanc, director of business development at Innergex, explains, "We are maximizing the current wind farm and the current road network in the second project," emphasizing the effort to minimize environmental impact of the construction of the second wind farm.

Only seven kilometres of new road will be added to the existing network of 68 kilometres built between 2013 and 2016 for the first Innergex-Migmawei Mawiomi Business Corporation (MMBC) wind farm. Consequently, only 110 hectares of forest will be cut for the new roads and the windmill construction. All the territory used by the two wind farms is situated on public land.

This utilization of existing infrastructure is one of the factors that reduces criticism of the project, as does the ab-

sence of a new connection line to the Hydro-Québec network, he also notes. The existing line has the capacity to absorb the new megawatts that will be generated by the upcoming wind farm.

"We want to maximize the hiring of Mi'gmaq workers but also workers from the region in general. We ideally want to have a third of the construction jobs, as for the first wind farm," adds Fred Vicaire, director general of the Migmawei Mawiomi Business Corporation, the organization dedicated to the economic development of the Gaspé Peninsula First Nations communities of Listuguj, Gesgapegiag and Gespeg.

Although the December 19 meeting was held under the supervision of the Bureau d'audiences publiques sur l'environnement, the BAPE, the organization evaluating ventures with potential environmental impact, it is uncertain if the course of events will force this organization to hold public hearings, a targeted consultation or a mediation process.

As explained by BAPE's spokesperson Karine Lavoie, for the Ministry of the Environment to initiate one or other of these additional steps, "a person, a group or a municipality must at least request a public consultation or mediation, and provide reasons for their request and a justification of interest in relation to the affected environment accompanies this request. The period within which the application must be submitted ends on January 12 at 11:59 p.m."

Wildlife little disturbed, according to experts

Because it will be located at altitude, the Mesgi'g Ugu's'n 2 project presents little risk for an endangered species like bats, notes Mathieu Féret, biologist and project manager for Pesca Environnement, the firm that carried out the environmental impact study linked to the wind farm.

Mr. Féret bases his statement on data provided by three years of monitoring of the first Mesgi'g Ugu's'n wind farm.

"There is mortality (of bats) observed but it is very low compared to other wind



Photo: G. Gagné

Fred Vicaire, from MMBC, and Luc Leblanc, from Innergex, personally answered questions from the public, after an audience-wide question period.

farms," notes Mr. Féret, specifying that the top of the plateaus is "very, very little frequented by bats."

Michel Chouinard, from the Regional Environmental Council of Gaspé Peninsula and Magdalen Islands, is interested in the burial depth of the electrical cables connecting the wind turbines to the wind farm substation, and he seems satisfied with the answer obtained, 1.5 metres. Generally speaking, he finds little fault with Mesgi'g Ugu's'n 2.

"We have already seen wind developers less concerned about the environment," explains Mr. Chouinard. Focusing on the noise standard that the MMBC and Innergex undertake to respect in order to disturb the peace and quiet in the forest as little as possible, he stressed that "40 decibels is a very low noise level".

Suppliers not yet announced

Luc Leblanc and Fred Vicaire have not announced yet the choice of the main suppliers that will equip the wind farm, nor have they revealed the name of the contractor that will carry out its construction.

"As long as it is not signed, we are not announcing anything," summarizes Luc Leblanc. However, he notes that the blades will not come from the LM Wind Power plant in Gaspé.

"The plant is busy with the delivery of blades for offshore

wind farms in the United States and they could not have delivered them to us in time for 2026," he says.

Mr. Leblanc remains discreet about the equipment manufacturers that will deliver the towers and turbines. The technical data provided at the December 19 public meeting, however, suggests that the towers and blades could be the most imposing installed to date in Quebec, since the masts (towers) could reach 120 metres and the blades, 80 metres. Once in service, the total height of each windmill could reach 207 metres above the ground, including the 7-metre hub containing the turbine.

Innergex and MMBC still haven't decided if they will opt for turbines with a capacity of 4.5 megawatts or 6 megawatts. This decision will evidently have an impact on the number of the project's windmills.

Until now, the largest blades installed in Quebec measure 56 metres and they equip the first Mesgi'g Ugu's'n windfarm. They came from the LM Wind Power Gaspé plant. That plant now produces 107-metre blades, and they are all exported to the United States, according to agreements that will cover at least the next three years. They are the biggest blades produced in the Americas.

The first Mesgi'g Ugu's'n park will generate benefits of \$200 million over 20 years for the Mi'gmaq communities of the Gaspé Peninsula. Fred Vi-

caire indicates that on an annual basis, the second park will be less advantageous, and not only because it is smaller, at 102.25 megawatts instead of 150.

"In the second park, it was a competitive call for tenders, with other projects. The benefits are satisfactory for the three communities but it is tighter," he assures.

The second wind farm will produce enough electricity to power 20,000 homes. Its construction will provide work for 300 people. Its operation will create four full-time jobs, in addition to the eight in the first wind farm. Occasional specialized maintenance jobs will be added. Innergex and the MMBC will try to fill the new positions with indigenous technicians. A training program is being put up for that purpose.

The Mesgi'g Ugu's'n wind farm will pay an annual fee of \$5,700 per megawatt installed to the MRC d'Avignon and \$500 per megawatt to a community initiatives fund, for a total of \$634,000 over 30 years, the duration of the contract signed between Hydro-Québec, the MMBC and Innergex.

The Government of Quebec will receive a total of \$648,099 over 30 years for the use of public land by the owners of the new wind farm. The choice of Mesgi'g Ugu's'n 2 had been announced in March 2023. It was selected following a 2021 call for tenders open to all forms of renewable energies, not just wind power.

Inspiring youth about their educational future

Students visit post-secondary schools in the Montreal area

DIANE SKINNER
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

GESGAPEGIAG and NEW RICHMOND: From November 5 to 11, a group of 20 grade 10 and 11 students from Gesgapegiag and New Richmond High School and their chaperones travelled to Montreal to tour colleges and universities.

The excursion was organized by the Gesgapegiag Education Services and the Eastern Shores School Board. Director of Education in Gesgapegiag, Kateri Martin tells SPEC that “The post-secondary tour stands out as a valuable opportunity. This program enables Gesgapegiag high school students to immerse themselves in firsthand experiences, gaining insights into various post-secondary programs that align with their interests.”

The well-planned trip was filled with exciting opportunities and adventures. Chaperone John Gedeon was impressed with the schools and other venues that the group experienced. These include McGill, Bishop and Concordia Universities, as well as John Abbott and Champlain Colleges. The visit to Kiuna College was particularly meaningful because the college bases most of its teach-



Credit: Gesgapegiag Educational Services

Abenaki Museum in Odanaka during the students’ visit of Kiuna College, a First Nations centric post-secondary school.

ings around First Nations culture and history. The visit to the Montreal Science Museum and in particular, the Abenaki Museum were inspirational and memorable experiences.

While in Montreal, the students were shown around Concordia by Aiden Condo of Gesgapegiag. Shauna Jerome, also of Gesgapegiag gave an impressive presentation to the group at Bishops University.

The students were very impressed with the schools, with some students saying that they

now knew where they were planning to attend post-secondary education, and some were excited about the opportunities that awaited them. One student stated, “I can’t wait to go here. This is where I belong.”

John Gedeon adds that “Seeing the ambitions spark up and explode was truly inspirational and a true honour for me to take part in. These trips are huge for giving students the key components in making any big decision in their lives ...

information! The students came back inspired young adults.” He adds that it was such a positive experience that he wished he could attend the schools himself.

Gracie Steinman, a grade 11 student at New Richmond High School, reflects that the trip was a wonderful experience. “Not only did I learn a great amount of information about colleges and universities but also about my peers. My favourite part of the trip was our visit to John Abbott Col-

lege. It had wonderful energy and an impressive theatre program.”

This year the trip focussed on visiting Quebec schools. Next year the intention is to take the students to tour schools in New Brunswick.

Director of Education, Gesgapegiag Kateri Martin shares that, “Gesgapegiag Education Services is dedicated to delivering high-quality support to our high school students, with a particular focus on fostering their post-secondary aspirations. By offering this immersive exposure, the tour not only inspires and motivates students but also equips them with a wealth of information to envision and shape their post-secondary futures. As students return home, they carry not only newfound inspiration but also a clearer understanding of the educational paths that may define their future endeavors.”

A special mention goes out to Alishia Caplan and Paulette Craig for their hard work and commitment in organizing and implementing the opportunities the students had.

The trip allowed the students, who are the future, to have the best possible opportunities for success.

Local business demonstrates holiday generosity

JENNA BOUDREAU
COMMUNITY CORRESPONDENT

NEW RICHMOND: Students and staff from New Richmond High School were pleasantly surprised this December when Russell and Dorothy Campbell, owners of A&R Decorations, a wreath and basket-making business established and operated in Cascapedia-St-Jules, called to offer 1000 wreaths for the entire student body to sell as a fundraiser.

Graduating student, Jacob Coull, and his family sold an incredible amount: over 115 wreaths! When asked what he thought of this event for the school, Jacob said “Overall, selling that many was pretty great. Our mother challenged us to sell as many wreaths as possible, and we went even further with it. We went house to house to sell within our town of Cascapedia-St-Jules. We even went to Malton’s in

Gesgapegiag to bring wreaths to be sold there. I am proud of what we have accomplished for our school.”

Ben Hall, a grade four student, was very excited when he received his paper to sell 10 wreaths and took the challenge quite seriously. He sold 34 wreaths in all, with the help of his mother Jessica. “I wanted to try and reach a goal of 30 wreaths and see how many I could get, and I sold 34, so I got an extra 4 sold. I was happy because I reached my goal.”

Students, staff, and family members worked together to sell the wreaths within a short period of time. With the Common Front strike week falling within the same period, it was somewhat challenging to sell all of the donated wreaths.

The rough estimate of wreaths sold is 600, which means that \$5,900 was raised for the school. This amount will be divided into two cate-



Russell and Dorothy Campbell with Ben Hall and Jacob Coull.

gories: A total of \$1,600 will go towards the grade 11 year-end trip, and the rest will be invested in the development

of a more interactive backyard area for all students.

Without the generous donation of Dorothy and Rus-

sell MacWhirter, this incredible opportunity for the school would not have been possible.

Percé will no longer have a Tourist Information Office

NELSON SERGERIE
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

PERCÉ - The Town of Percé, known as the Tourist Capital of the Gaspé Peninsula, has made the difficult decision to close its Tourist Information Office in the heart of the town's historic district due to budgetary constraints. The closure announcement, made just prior to tabling the 2024 budget, has sparked an outcry among the citizens

"I am forced to announce a decision that is inconceivable for a tourist destination town like Percé. We are announcing the closure of the Tourist Information Office because we cannot afford to pay for it," said the Mayor of Percé, Cathy Poirier.

According to the mayor, maintaining the office costs \$168,000 in addition to the management's salary.

"That corresponded to a tax increase of 4.5%. Just this element. 1% taxes in Percé is barely \$40,000," explains the elected official.

The mayor wrote a letter to the premier (Francois Legault), which was sent on December 21.

"It's a cry from the heart to say that for a tourist destination like Percé it's inconceivable that we'd come to this decision. We can't make cuts elsewhere, and we can't run deficits. Decisions had to be made, and it wasn't easy," stated the mayor.

"A destination like Percé, with 550 square kilometres, 3,095 citizens, is too important and we are no longer able to maintain these tourist infrastructures in a suitable manner and we can no longer maintain a tourist office," adds Ms. Poirier.

The town will attempt to create a non-profit organization to maintain the office and the five jobs which could consist of people from the municipality and the tourism industry.

"We will do everything to help. We are ready to leave the premises, provide the resource for the first year which would allow the tourist industry to work with us and maintain the service," mentions the mayor as a possibility.

The Town of Percé did not discuss the issue with the Member of the National Assembly for Gaspé, Stéphane Sainte-Croix prior to announcing the decision to close its tourist information office.

In an email reaction the

day after the announcement, Stéphane Sainte-Croix's office indicated that this is a decision made by the municipal council. He, however, intends to contact the municipality to find out how he can support them in the future.

The Ministry of Tourism noted in an email that it has been made aware of the decision by the Town of Percé and is respecting the town's autonomy on the issue. "It is important to emphasize that the ministry has not had any discussions with the Town of Percé regarding its decision to close its Tourist Information Office. We will therefore reserve our comments at this point," writes Jean-Manuel Téotonio, communications advisor.

Difficult budget

The 2024 budget year was very difficult to develop. "When we started working on the budget, 20% of taxes were missing. We reduced, we compressed. We are announcing a 7% increase for residential and 15% for commercial," mentions the elected official.

She specifies that there have been cutbacks in several departments. "But we can't cut snow removal," the mayor gives as an example.

The budget is \$7.6 million in 2024, up only 3.47% from 2023.

In the introduction, Ms. Poirier mentioned that her objective when she first arrived at the town hall in 2017 was to reduce the tax burden on citizens.

She explained that since 2020, inflation has represented 17.3%, which in absolute terms would have represented a budget of \$8.1 million.

"In 2020, we tried to put in place a new regulation that would allow us to seek different income. We saw the hit coming, we tried to do it and it was not possible to do it and in 2024, it hit us," she said in her pre-budget speech.

The mayor was referring to the tourist fee which had brought in \$155,000 in its first year of operation in 2022, but which was invalidated by the court in June 2023. The town is appealing this decision.

Since 2017, the mayor calculates that taxes have fallen by 0.86%. "We kept our promise not to increase the tax burden on citizens," she said.

This year, equalization fell



Mayor Cathy Poirier during the announcement of the closure on December 20

by \$375,000, which represents the equivalent of 9.5% taxes.

"We cut everything that was possible," says the elected official.

In an interview, the mayor mentioned that maintaining existing infrastructure requires more and more resources as buildings age.

Ms. Poirier has visited other tourist municipalities, including Tremblant, Saint-Sauveur, Chambly, Magog, in an attempt to find comparables.

"It makes no sense that 15% of municipal taxes went to the tourism industry. It supports a lot of families in the area and Percé is also on the outskirts. I told myself that these people pay for tourism promotion and we wanted to relieve citizens of this burden," says the elected official.

"We never claimed that the tourist fee was the perfect tool. We were inventing it. We knew we'd have to ask the industry to support us. You've seen what's happened, and now we find ourselves with a budget where the tourist fee is missing. It's heartbreaking to close the tourist office. We can't cut the fire department, snow removal, the registry, everything that's essential. About 90% of the budget is tied up and obligatory," explains Ms. Poirier.

The year 2023 which is ending has been difficult for Cathy Poirier.

The rejection by the court of the tourist fee, the allegations surrounding the director of Urban Planning, who is also Ms. Poirier's spouse, Ghislain Pitre and now, the closure of the Tourist Information Office were elements which provoked difficult de-

bates.

"What I have experienced in the last few months has not been easy," says the mayor, full of emotion.

Asked about the possibility of reconsidering her work at town hall, "I can't answer that this evening," replies Ms. Poirier.

The division of the municipal council is now in the open.

At the beginning of December three councillors questioned whether Ms. Poirier should be present at the municipal council and

since then the pro-mayor, Jonathan Côté, also seems to be leaning in this direction.

"I checked with ethics advisors. I called the Municipal Commission. I have (received) written legal opinions that I must not leave. Not only can I stay, but I don't have to leave. I am within my rights and I am committed to the community of Percé," she adds.

Two reasons motivated her entry into politics: reducing the tax burden and improving the quality of life of citizens.

"I am here for the common interest. This is not a concept necessarily well understood by everyone. We can make bad decisions because on the surface, things are going well. But we can make good decisions which are in the common interest, but which are perhaps less popular," continues the elected official.

Ms. Poirier notes her career in economic and social development for 25 years and has trained in governance. "It's a passion to work for people. To volunteer for people. I don't think I'll spend my life in the Town of Percé. But I don't want to leave just yet," says Ms. Poirier in conclusion.

GASPE BUDGET

Cont'd from cover

that offer services to the population, another quarter is attached to long-term investments and organizations, and one-quarter goes to maintenance of existing equipment, including road paving, rolling stock, etc.," outlines the mayor. Despite the sharp increase in costs in the construction sector, 80 new residential units will be constructed this year, with 44 being rental units.

Additionally, 692 permits were issued by the Urban Planning Department, totaling investments of \$47.7 million.

"Surprised at the vitality of the construction. We saw that fewer single-family units were being built, the statistics show it. It was almost cut in half. On the other hand, rental housing: 44 new units this year. You could see it was moving a little, but I didn't think it was moving that much. 80 new units this year compared to 102 last year, yes, it's a decline, but not as bad as expected," notes the mayor in a context where building is expensive and very high interest rates.

"It slows down real estate,

but not that much," notes the mayor.

Among the residential projects that will be realized, Gaspé has confirmed 144 housing units near the IGA, 84 affordable housing units near the MAPAQ, 64 housing units near Forest Street, and others that are in development.

The three-year capital plan accounts for \$117 million in projects.

"It is enormous. We will not hide it. There are investments to be made but we won't do them without subsidies except for small things. We will not build a \$28 million arena without subsidies. We will not redo the upgrading of the drinking water network and the wastewater network of Rivière-au-Renard without subsidies," warns Mr. Côté.

The Rivière-au-Renard infrastructure project is worth \$48 million and the Gaspé arena costs \$34 million, including plans and specifications.

Like other towns in the region, Gaspé is implementing a participatory budget in 2024, with \$50,000 reserved for this first version. Calls for projects should be launched in April.

The year that was 2023

● DIANE SKINNER

“May your coming year be filled with magic and dreams. I hope you read some fine books (or newspapers) and kiss someone who thinks you’re wonderful, and don’t forget to make some art – write or draw or build or sing or live as only you can. And I hope, somewhere in the next year, you surprise yourself.”

It’s a brand new year and to paraphrase L.M. Montgomery, author of Anne of Green Gables, the brand new year has no mistakes in it – yet. But we have a whole year to fill our days with love and successes both big and small. The world did not improve in 2023 because there was so much hate and division. Let’s look forward with some hope for a world where we all love, respect, and tolerate each other and life gets better for everyone. We always have hope. Just when we feel that we have sunk to the bottom, hope can pull us through. Okay 2024, we all hope for better things ahead.

In 2023 The Gaspé Spec brought you the local news every week. Let’s look back at some of the headlines from the year that was. A cursory look at these headlines tells the reader a great deal about some of the issues Gaspésians are affected by: Natural resources such as fishing, logging and mining, infrastructure and investments, wind power, housing (or the lack of), the railway, and social issues. How many of these articles do you recall?

- Surplus saves Gaspé citizens from a massive tax hike. (January 11, 2023)
- Golf Fort-Prével will submit its business plan to Quebec to renovate the infrastructure. (January 18, 2023)
- Caribou population on the Gaspé Peninsula remains stable. (January 25, 2023)
- Snow crab outlook for 2023: It could be a tough year, according to Bill Sheehan. (February 1, 2023)
- A good year for moose hunters. (February 8, 2023)
- Jenn Harrison now receives hemodialysis treatment at Maria hospital. (February 15, 2023)
- Gaspesian companies interested in acquiring Magdalen Islands shellfish processing plants. (February 22, 2023)
- Bonaventure’s Services X Wind acquires Techéol for \$12M (March 1, 2023)
- An announcement in the coming months for redfish fishing. (March 8, 2023)

- Second Annual Chic-Choc’s dog race will take place from March 18-20. (March 15, 2023)
- Tenders: 800 megawatts for Eastern Energy Alliance. (March 22, 2023)
- Good news for the railway. (March 29, 2023)
- Rhéal Pitre Sports opens new store. (April 5, 2023)
- Cime Aventure attempts to prove the Quebec government does not have the jurisdiction to deal with navigation on the Bonaventure River. (April 12, 2023)
- Gaspé to greet 30 cruise ships this year. (April 19, 2023)
- Transports Quebec reduces investments in the Gaspé Peninsula and the Magdalen Islands by 13.5% (April 26, 2023)
- Lobster fishing season underway in the Gaspé Peninsula. (May 3, 2023)
- Saint-Elzéar sawmill becomes the Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie’s newest customer. (May 10, 2023)
- First 107-metre blade leaves the LM Wind Power facility in Gaspé. (May 17, 2023)
- Keeping kids safe: S.P.D.S. participates in School Zone Awareness Week. (May 24, 2023)
- Telus to open new cellular phone zones: Road network will be prioritized. (May 31, 2023)
- Group invests \$14M in multi-dwelling housing for New Richmond and Carleton. (June 7, 2023)
- Town of Gaspé addresses housing shortage. (June 14, 2023)
- Cases of neglect and emotional abuse continue to dominate retained reports. (June 21, 2023)
- MMBC invests in East Coast Wind to enter the wind-mill maintenance industry. (June 28, 2023)
- A whopping additional contribution of \$517.6M by Transports Quebec: Total cost to reach \$871.8M and be completed by 2026. (July 6, 2023)
- On your mark, get set, go! First Mi’gmaq couple compete on the Amazing Race. (July 12, 2023)
- Cap-des-Rosiers lighthouse closed to public. (July 19, 2023)
- Osisko Mining officializes acquisition of Murdochville mine from Glencore. (July 26, 2023)
- Diane Lebouthillier becomes Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard. (August 2, 2023)
- New Carlisle prison damage: Four years later and still no cell repair timeline. (August 9, 2023)
- New Carlisle sustains hun-

- dreds of thousands of dollars in damage due to heavy rain: Up to 135 millimetres fell in 24 hours. (August 16, 2023)
- Overnight closure of the Paspébiac CLSC is criticized by many. (August 23, 2023)
- Shigawake Agricultural Fair and music festival. (August 30, 2023)
- New Richmond Agricultural Fair popular despite showers. (September 6, 2023)
- Marinard suspends operations. (September 13, 2023)
- Audet family experiences disappointing shortcomings in psychiatric services. (September 20, 2023)
- Gaspé Peninsula is on the verge of losing a provincial riding. (September 27, 2023)
- Barachois, our village and its barachois: Photo contest winners are announced. (October 4, 2023)
- Local schools join the walk to honour National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. (October 11, 2023)
- Reduction in the number of \$500 airline tickets: More innovation needed, according to Daniel Côté and Gaetan Lelièvre. (October 18, 2023)
- When will there be a free insulin pump? A citizen of Maria, André Audet has been waiting for a response since 2021. (October 25, 2023)
- The Coast Guard’s first hybrid vessel will be built in Gaspé. (November 1, 2023)
- Marinard sold to Bill and George Sheehan. (November 8, 2023)
- Close to 7,300 regional public sector workers demonstrated on November 15. (2023)
- Grade 5 and 6 students from Wejgwapniag School learn about Indigenous veterans. (November 22, 2023)
- Major public sector demonstrations held everywhere in the Gaspé Peninsula. (November 29, 2023)
- Transports Quebec offers Black Cape property owners much less than minimum market value. (December 6, 2023)
- Family Ties welcomes community in their newly renovated building. (December 13, 2023)
- Gilker Residence inaugurates a new lounge, supported by local programs and donations. (December 20, 2023)



Reflections

by
Diane Skinner Flowers



Treasure in a bucket: Ashes!

“When you heat with wood, you always have it in your arms.” My grandfather

If you heat your home with wood, you know what a huge commitment of time and effort that is. Many Gaspésians cut down the tree, block it, haul it home, split it, pile it until it’s dry, carry it into the house, feed the fire, and clean the ashes. They then scoop the ashes into a bucket making sure that there are no embers in it, and perhaps add water to the ashes to make sure they are out. However, our resourceful Gaspesian ancestors used those ashes in a number of ways. Waste not, want not.

Hardwood, like maple or yellow birch, will produce a lot of ashes but all wood ash can be used. Ash was used in ancient Rome to enrich the soil, so this is not a new idea. The old ways have value and the past has lessons to teach us.

Wood ash is great for compost and soil. No fuss at all, just dump the ash bucket in your compost pile. Save your wood ash which can be sprinkled directly in your vegetable garden and the calcium will feed plants such as tomatoes, beans, peas and garlic.

The ash can also get rid of slugs in your garden. Place wood ash around the stems of your rose plants and this will make the plant stronger and produce flowers that are bigger and more colourful.

Ashes can be used as a stain remover but try to use it when the stain is fresh. Just rub in a small amount and wash as usual. No need to buy chemical stain remover.

Wood ash is a great way to get rid of unwanted smells. Place some ash in a small container and it will absorb odours from the air. After a day or two, throw out the ashes. You can place a container in your fridge instead of baking soda and it will keep your fridge smelling fresh.

You can brush your teeth with wood ash, and this will whiten your teeth. This is because wood ash contains potassium hydroxide, which is also known as lye. Use this sparingly, as it can be harsh on teeth. This natural toothpaste has been used since ancient times but use just a little.

If you have a pesky anthill, do not use pesticides that do more harm to the earth than ants ever will. Dump ash on the hill and the ants will move to a new location. Relocation may solve your ant problem. You can place ashes near beehives to repel ants which can ruin a hive.

Ash can be used to melt ice because the ash has a high salt content. Keep a bucket handy for your icy driveway.

You can use ashes to clean car headlights that have become cloudy. Make a thick paste and rub it in small circles to help make headlights clear again.

If you want to sample how life was for our Gaspesian ancestors, you can make lye soap, which is made from ashes. This is an undertaking for those who are very serious about returning to the old ways. You need to boil the ashes, outside is safest, in an old pot. Place in some ashes, a bit of rain water and boil for about 20 minutes. Allow to cool and the ashes will sink to the bottom. The lye that can be used for soap will be on the top and you will need to skim it off.

Ash can be used to put out a small fire.

Does your dog have fleas? Make a paste out of ash and vinegar. Now rub it around the neck area. Rinse off after a few hours. Sounds smelly and messy? The alternative is a chemical product. Also, ashes can help with removing the odour of skunk spray. I apologize to all dogs for this – but if it’s helpful.

Storing old clothes? Remember mothballs which smell horrible? Instead of mothballs, add a little cloth bag of ashes as it will repel moths.

If your basement is very damp or humid, place ashes in rinsed out food cans around the basement and it will absorb some of the moisture. Replace as needed.

ARIES – Mar 21/Apr 20
Aries, watch out because you are hot stuff this week. Coming off the excitement of the holidays, you're still in the mood to socialize. The invitations to various social events will still flow.
TAURUS – Apr 21/May 21
Hopefully you've made progress on the various organizational projects that you have had in mind, Taurus. Now is the time to get those resolutions moving.
GEMINI – May 22/Jun 21
Gemini, how is your to-do list coming along? If you haven't yet gotten moving, a coming slowdown could make the perfect time to get cracking.
CANCER – Jun 22/Jul 22
Cancer, right now you may be feeling like hibernating, especially if the weather is changing. Don't burrow under the covers just yet. Find a way to stay busy and socialize.
LEO – Jul 23/Aug 23
Leo, even if it seems the way to be the most productive, burning the candle at both ends is only going to make you tired and less efficient. Ask for help if you need it.



VIRGO – Aug 24/Sept 22
Virgo, your innate humility means you're often content with being behind the scenes and not in the limelight. However, this week you may want a little extra fanfare.
LIBRA – Sept 23/Oct 23
Libra, after a season of partying and letting other tasks fall by the wayside, it is time to get back to focus. You must take out your financial account records and track spending right now.
SCORPIO – Oct 24/Nov 22
Take an inventory of the things you want to change about yourself, Scorpio. There is always room for improvement, especially if you feel you have not been your best self lately.
SAGITTARIUS – Nov 23/Dec 21
Hopefully you have met your quota of parties and social events because now is the time to take a break, Sagittarius. The invitations will


cease, but that can be a good thing for you.
CAPRICORN – Dec 22/Jan 20
It's often business as usual for you to burn the midnight oil, Capricorn. But scale back on those late-night interludes. That's a recipe for burnout that can derail your bigger plans.
AQUARIUS – Jan 21/Feb 18
Aquarius, you are the zodiac's team player, so you may have to give the troops a pep talk to get everyone working together this week. Smooth down any ruffled feathers as needed.
PISCES – Feb 19/Mar 20
If you have any unfinished business that needs to get wrapped up, Pisces, the clock is ticking. Make a strong attempt to finish by Wednesday or Thursday.

FAMOUS BIRTHDAYS

JANUARY 7: Jeremy Renner, Actor (53)
JANUARY 8: Damiano David, Singer (25)
JANUARY 9: Nina Dobrev, Actress (35)
JANUARY 10: Renee Rapp, Singer (24)
JANUARY 11: Kyle Richards, Reality Star (55)
JANUARY 12: Jeff Bezos, Entrepreneur (60)
JANUARY 13: Orlando Bloom, Actor (47)

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Announcements



Obituaries



HALL: Irby

February 22, 1937 – December 17, 2023

Passed away peacefully at Blind River hospital at the age of 86. Loving husband of Gayle (63 years). Much loved father of Kathy, Mindy (Jim) and Jody (Nate). Reunited with daughters Kelly and Karen (1970). Grandfather to Tanya (Chris), Adam (Lindsey), Kennedy and David. Great- grandpa to Daelyn, Hayden, Grayson, Ryan, James and Noah.

Predeceased by four brothers and four sisters. Survived by brothers Arvill and Reynold. Irby was a wonderful husband, father, grandfather and great-grandpa. He was a friend to everyone both human and animal.

The family would like to thank Thessalon and Blind River hospitals for their excellent care and kindness. Donations to a charity of your choice would be appreciated.

Family and friends were invited to a funeral service at Thessalon Bible Chapel on January 6, 2024 beginning at 2 p.m. Tim MacDougall officiated. Light refreshments were served in the church hall following the service.

VIBERT: Mary Ellen Roxanna (Ellen)

Passed away peacefully at the Kemptville Hospital on December 16, 2023, in her 89th year.

Beloved wife of Allison Miller, cherished mother of Nathen Aswell (Kim), Dwayne (Johanne), Karen, and Todd (Catherine) Hill. Devoted Nana to Nathan, Nicholas and Matthew.

Funeral arrangements will be as follows: Visitation: Sunday, January 14, 2024, from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. and 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. at Hulse, Playfair & McGarry Funeral Home, 805 Prescott St., Kemptville, Ontario

Service: Monday, January 15 at 11 a.m., at the Holy Cross Catholic Church, 503 Clothier St. W., Kemptville, Ontario.

Reception: Monday, January 15, after the service, at the Royal Canadian Legion (Branch 212), 100 Reuben Crescent, Kemptville, Ontario.

In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to the Kemptville Hospital or the Canadian Cancer Society.

*"God's garden must be beautiful
He always takes the best."*



WHITE: Lydia (Languedoc)

In loving memory, Lydia White (Languedoc), formerly of Bois Brule, passed away on December 22, 2023, at the age of 88.

She is survived by her family: Deborah Languedoc (Martin), Kevin Languedoc, Richard Languedoc (Maria-Rosa), Stephanie Chatel (Bruce), Patrick Languedoc, Megan Languedoc (Rob), Justin Picard and great-grandson Jack Talbot.

Obituary - 150 words - \$50
150-250 words - \$55
250+ words
quote will be provided
In memory: 150 words - \$35
150-250 words - \$45
Funeral, Celebration of Life,
Card of Thanks, Engagement,
Birth, Prayer, Birthday - \$35
Wedding - \$55
To add a picture with any of
the above: \$10 extra.



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BARACHOIS:
Tai Chi Open House
January 16: A Tai Chi open house will take place at the Mountain View Golden Age from 10 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Everyone is welcome to come and try it out! Contact Janet for more info 418-355-4899

PORT DANIEL:
Three Star Golden Age Club
Tuesdays: Pétanque from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. every Tuesday evening. Cost is \$3.

HOPE:
Hope Baptist Church
Sundays: Sunday School starting at 10 a.m. Worship service beginning at 11 a.m.

NEW CARLISLE:
Bible Chapel Meetings
Sundays: 9:30 a.m. Breaking of Bread for believers. 2 p.m. Gospel meeting and Sunday School.
Thursdays: 7 p.m. Prayer Meeting and Bible Study. Everyone welcome! For

more information: 418-752-3372 or 418-752-6011.

NEW CARLISLE:
Royal Canadian Legion Branch #64
Please be advised that Legion memberships are available for \$45. Returning and new members welcome.
February 6: General meeting at 7 p.m. at 1 Mount Sorrel, New Carlisle

CASCAPEDIA-ST-JULES:
Book Room
Please be advised that the book room is closed until

January 10. Anyone who needs assistance can contact Kathleen at 418-392-4896.

CASCAPEDIA-ST-JULES:
50+ Club
Tuesdays: Grocery bingo every Tuesday at 7 p.m. \$10 for three cards. Extra cards are \$1 each.

**UNITED CHURCH
NEW RICHMOND
Sunday, January 14**
10 a.m. Service

**UNITED CHURCH
HOPE TOWN
Sunday, January 14**
10 a.m. Service

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Cascapedia-St-Jules holds third annual Christmas parade

JENNA BOUDREAU
COMM. CORRESPONDENT

The third annual Christmas Parade in Cascapedia-St-Jules took place on December 16. Despite the absence of snow, that didn't dampen the energy and excitement as 17 floats arrived and took their positions with the assistance of local firemen and the parade committee.

The floats were separated into groups with two starting points, namely the Cascapedia River Lodge and Sextons and Sextons fly shop.

Participants arrived well before the parade began and were ready to go at the start time of 6 p.m. The floats were incredibly decorated with Christmas lights, garlands, and festive trinkets, illuminating Rue des Ponts and Gallagher Street.

The New Richmond Cadets joined in on the fun, marching at the beginning of the parade with their musical instruments and hoisting flags. The Polar Express crafted by Jessica and Jeff Hall last year, made a return appearance.

Several students and one enthusiastic adult (or so she says) donned amusing inflatable costumes, including a snowman, a Christmas tree, an elf and a gingerbread man. Side-by-sides, a snowplow, canoe, car and a beautiful old truck were on floats this year, making the parade a fun and interesting spectacle to watch!

Finally, rounding up the beauty of the parade were Santa and Mrs. Claus on a float, accompanied by children waving to the substantial crowd of spectators standing along the route.

Hot chocolate was once again served this year as a treat to stay warm, with the new location being the Cascapedia-St-Jules Royal Canadian Legion. A new event was a fundraiser for the New Richmond High School grade 11 graduating class. A few students sold cookies and hot soup, raising roughly \$150 to go towards their year-end trip.

The parade committee, consisting of Cascapedia-St-Jules mayor, Ashley Milligan, Jessica Hall, Lisa Cleary, Kelsi and Caitlin Barter and Jenna Boudreau were pleased with everyone who took part in the parade, both as viewers and participants.

We look forward to seeing everyone next year for the fourth edition of the Cascapedia-St-Jules Christmas Parade!



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