

Listuguj homeless shelter faces closure due to federal funding withdrawal

GILLES GAGNÉ

LISTUGUJ – The only organization offering accommodation to Indigenous homeless people in the Gaspé Peninsula, the Epgwas’g Temporary Shelter, is at risk of closing at the end of March. Epgwas’g means being protected from the elements in Mi’gmaq.

Its main funder, Indigenous Services Canada, which provided \$514,000 for the 2024-2025 fiscal year, is withdrawing its support. The cut comes just three years and a few weeks after the shelter opened.

Since February 2022, the Epgwas’g Shelter has temporarily housed hundreds of people, not only homeless citizens of Listuguj but also individuals from beyond the community, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, sometimes from locations as far as 150 kilometres away. There are no other shelters for the homeless in the Gaspé Peninsula and the adjacent part of New Brunswick.

Epgwas’g Board Chair Cathy Martin recently learned of the funding cuts from Indigenous Services Canada (ISC), a federal ministry, while undertaking budget renewal efforts for the 2025-2026 fiscal year.

“In November 2022, the



Photos: G. Gagné

Cathy Martin, right, and Sylvia Isaac, left, struggle to comprehend why the Epgwas’g Shelter can no longer get a guarantee that money will be supplied on a yearly basis for homelessness, given the permanent status of the problem.

Epgwas’g Board obtained operational dollars from Indigenous Services Canada through their Pathways for Safe Indigenous Communities Fund. As of March 2025, these funds are no longer available for the Epgwas’g Temporary Shelter. Indigenous Services Canada redirected us to ‘Reaching Home’ a Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada program, with millions of dollars to end Indigenous Homelessness. Our board eagerly reached out to this program only to be told that the majority of this funding is reserved for

Indigenous populations living in the urban centres of Montreal, Quebec City, Amos, Sept-Îles and Gatineau, leaving minimal amounts to be shared amongst the reserve communities,” explains Ms. Martin.

“It’s as if homelessness doesn’t exist on reserves, in smaller communities. Why prioritize urban centres? There’s also homelessness in rural areas! We don’t understand this way of seeing things. Homelessness can happen anywhere and affect everyone! We saw it here for three years,” she adds. Listuguj has a population of just

over 2,000 people, and many of its members live in surrounding municipalities. The majority of the Epgwas’g clients are Listuguj community members and Mi’gmaq from other communities.

“However, our shelter did not turn its back on provincial clients from neighbouring provinces of New Brunswick and Quebec who sought refuge, as hunger, homelessness, and mental illness have no race, gender, or geographical borders. The Epgwas’g Shelter received referrals from both the Maria and Campbellton hospitals, the CLSC, the RCMP, the SQ (Sûreté du Québec), the LPD (Listuguj Police Department), the Listuguj Health Centre, Listuguj Social Services and the New Carlisle Detention Centre,” stresses Cathy Martin.

A sustained effort to create Epgwas’g

The founders of the Epgwas’g Shelter began working on this project in the middle of the pandemic, precisely in the summer of 2020. Cathy Martin, who has a doctorate in education, and her team managed to raise awareness among all social and economic spheres of Listuguj, and those of several

surrounding communities, so that they would contribute to its foundation.

“There is not one small business in Listuguj that did not contribute in some way to the fundraising efforts of the Board to establish a much-needed homeless shelter in our community. Small businesses from the neighbouring Mi’gmaq communities of Gesgapegiag and Ugpi’ganjig (formerly known as Eel River Bar) also sent support as did many of the merchants from Campbellton and Atholville. Our local radio station CHRQ supported us and kept the public informed of our progress. We received so much community support that on behalf of the Epgwas’g board, we can proudly say that 100% of all the furniture and household items within the shelter were donated by individuals and the business sector of our region,” recalls Ms. Martin.

The house at 3 Pacific Drive, a former convenience store, was purchased on a lease-to-own agreement from Connie Metallic, a Listuguj citizen.

“Every directorate within our Listuguj Mi’gmaq Government contributed to the development of the shelter; the Director of Security provided us with the necessary safety items needed to operate and open including fire extinguishers, exits, etc... The Health Directorate gave us the guidance of shelter regulations and food safety as well as all the personal protective equipment necessary during Covid. The Capital Directorate provided us with labour and materials for small repairs. The Social Services Directorate often provided us with food and winter clothing for clients,” remembers Cathy Martin.

She also underlines that the “Natural Resource Department deployed its own revenue to assure some operational salary funding for the first few



Epgwas’g is located in a former convenience store, at 3, Pacific Drive.

SHELTER:

▶ Cont'd from cover

months. “The LMG (Listuguj Mi’gmaq Government) administration offices helped channel our funding, and the Chief and Council helped carry us through the long waiting times of federal funding. Even the Education sector supported us with donations of moose meat from their Outdoor Education Program and the classrooms of the Alaqsitew Gitpu School would host food drives. Often hunters and fishers would donate traditional food, salmon and moose. The list of community support for this much-needed shelter is admirable,”

states Ms. Martin, with emotions. Indigenous Services Canada’s operating budget finally came in November 2022, eight months after Epgwas’g opened. The annual sum varied quite a bit, from \$108,017 in 2022-2023 to \$432,071 in 2023-2024 and \$514,071 in 2024-2025. Even if the sum of \$514,000 did not meet the needs of the centre, but its board of directors devoted its energy to reaching the \$700,000 needed to keep it running smoothly. “We have 13 employees with no fringe benefits and a capacity of eight people per night. All the money goes to the shelter’s operation. The centre

is also open during the day. It is often too cold to stay outside, and we serve meals during the day,” specifies Cathy Martin. **Why cut now?** Cathy Martin wonders what motivates Indigenous Services Canada to prioritize urban homelessness over that experienced in more rural communities. “This led to the Epgwas’g Board’s questioning of the motive for Indigenous Services Canada to prioritize the First Nation homelessness in the urban centres. Is it because the Federal Government of Canada does not want the constituents of these Urban centres to see

the ills of society they created amongst our Nations by removing them from the streets where Canadians cannot be reminded of our traumatic history – no one sees homelessness on reserve besides other First Nations so perhaps it’s not as important?” she suggests. “Or is it the continuation of creating the perception that off-reserve has a better lifestyle for our people, by enticing even the homeless to leave the community in hopes of better standards of living? We, the Board of Epgwas’g, do not understand the rationale of the federal government for providing funding for urban centres,” continues Ms. Martin. The Listuguj Mi’gmaq Gov-

ernment does not have the means to take over a program from Indigenous Services Canada, assures Ms. Martin, who is a member of the band council. “Our local government has already advanced significant amounts of money to allow us to continue our activities while waiting for money from Indigenous Services Canada. We can’t ask for more. The other potential sources of funding are small, and we contacted them to make up the difference between the \$514,000 grant and our \$700,000 budget. We tried small venues and came up with all the \$20,000 and \$30,000 amounts possible,” concludes Cathy Martin.

Indigenous Services Canada transferred the Epgwas’g file to another ministry

GILLES GAGNÉ

LISTUGUJ – The Ministry of Indigenous Services of Canada (ISC) has transferred the Epgwas’g Shelter file to another department, specifically the Ministry of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities of Canada instead of extending its funding to 2025-2026 fiscal year, according to a ISC communication officer. Indigenous Services Canada began funding Epgwas’g at the end of the 2022-2023 financial year, which ended on March 31 of the latter year. The first grant of \$108,017 was followed by a four-fold grant of \$432,071 for 2023-2024, and \$514,071 for the current fiscal year, which ends on March 31, 2025.

The money came from the Pathways to Safe Indigenous Communities Initiative, “which is providing \$120 million over 5 years (2021-2026) to Indigenous communities and organizations to implement Indigenous-designed projects to improve community safety and well-being,” says Jacinthe Goulet, communication officer for Indigenous Services of Canada. When asked why the grant was not carried over the financial year that will start on April 1, 2025, considering that the program will be active until 2026, Ms. Goulet responded in writing that the “Pathways Initiative is time-limited (2021-2026) (and) ISC (Indigenous Services Canada) is working with the



Photo: G. Gagné

The Epgwas’g Shelter was founded following an intense effort from the businesses and citizens of Listuguj and the surrounding communities.

Shelter to provide guidance on other funding avenues to explore, such as Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada’s (HICC) Reaching Home Program.”

This is the program that the board of Epgwas’g Shelter has attempted to secure funding from, without suc-

cess as of January 22. The SPEC has asked additional questions to the Ministry of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities of Canada. The ministry’s communication department has committed to answering “as soon as possible.”

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Liberal Party of Canada leadership race: Lebouthillier endorses Freeland

Nelson Sergerie

GRANDE-RIVIÈRE - Diane Lebouthillier, the Member of Parliament (MP) for the Gaspé Peninsula and the Magdalen Islands, has announced her support for former Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Chrystia Freeland, in the race for the leadership of the Liberal Party of Canada.

In a brief statement shared on social media on January 16, Diane Lebouthillier expressed her backing for Freeland. “We are at a critical time for the future of our country. Chrystia Freeland has always had Quebec and the French language at heart. Having known her for over nine years, I can tell you that she is the best person to embody the change we need in the Liberal Party,” wrote the Liberal MP, showing her strong support for the leadership hopeful.

Ms. Freeland officially entered the leadership race on January 19. She is up against former Bank of Canada and Bank of England Governor Mark Carney, who announced his candidacy on January 16 in Edmonton, Alberta.

The leadership race was sparked by Chrystia Freeland’s resignation on December 16, a move that set off a political crisis within the Liberal Party. Following this, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced on January 6 that he would step down once a successor was found.

The leadership race is on a tight timeline. The deadline to announce their candidacy was January 23, and the registration fee was set at \$350,000. The new leader of the Liberal Party will be chosen on March 9 and will essentially be poised to become the next prime minister of Canada.

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Former DPJ director rejected by administrative labour tribunal

NELSON SERGERIE
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

GASPÉ - Diane Perron, the former director of Youth Protection for the Gaspé Peninsula and Magdalen Islands, has failed in her bid to have an occupational injury claim from October 2017 recognized by the Administrative Labour Tribunal against the Gaspé Peninsula Integrated Health and Social Services Centre (CISSS) and its former deputy president and Chief executive officer Connie Jacques.

A 15-page decision filed by Administrative Judge Sophie Moulin in December rejected Ms. Perron's application, citing the employer's right of management.

Initially, the Commission des normes, de l'équité, de la santé et de la sécurité du travail (CNESST) had accepted the claim and declared that Ms. Perron had suffered a work-related accident. In administrative review, the Commission upheld its decision, which the CISSS challenged before the court.

The CISSS argued that the alleged circumstances could not be described as an unforeseen and sudden event within the meaning of Section 2 of the Act respecting industrial accidents and occupational diseases.

Diane Perron's representative argued that her client had suffered a work accident under this section.

Diane Perron became director of youth protection when the CISSS was created in 2015. Following certain events, the former director of Youth Protection filed a complaint of psychological harassment in December 2017 as well as a complaint for prohibited practices since she considered herself the victim of reprisals due to illness and, on the other hand, she filed a claim for an occupational injury.

A court decision dismissed the complaint of psychological harassment, noted her withdrawal concerning the complaint for prohibited practices and declared that she had not suffered an occupational injury. However, Ms. Perron is requesting a review of the conclusion applicable to the claim for the employment injury.

In a subsequent review, the tribunal concluded that there was a lack of motivation regarding the employment injury, revoked the decision and re-



Photo: Courtesy of Diane Perron

Former DPJ Director Diane Perron.

turned the file to the Tribunal, hence the present dispute and the holding of a new hearing.

The tribunal therefore had to determine whether Ms. Perron suffered an employment injury from a work accident in October 2017.

The employer's representative maintains that the Deputy President and CEO, Connie Jacques, is exercising her legitimate management rights and that the situations described are not unexpected and sudden events within the meaning of the Act.

Ms. Perron's representative maintains that the accumulation of events and incidents that have occurred since the end of fall 2016 can be considered an unexpected and sudden event within the meaning of the Act and that the diagnosed injury, namely an adjustment disorder with mixed mood, is related to them.

The alleged events are mainly the receipt of emails from Connie Jacques, the exclusion of the worker from the clinical coordination committee meetings and the meeting of October 16, 2017.

In the fall of 2016, several emails were exchanged between Ms. Perron and Ms. Jacques. However, the tone, words and style of Ms. Jacques' messages led Ms. Perron to file a complaint for psychological harassment according to the employer's internal policy.

A mediation process was held in March 2017, during which Connie Jacques acknowledged the facts and apologized to the worker. Afterward, Ms. Perron confirmed that after the mediation the writings were clearer. "Things were going well," she stated.

However, while the emails themselves were not deemed an unforeseen and sudden event

by the court, they were considered potential triggers for interpersonal conflicts and the psychological stress that followed.

Moreover, in her complaint of psychological harassment on December 5, 2017, Ms. Perron states that her superior's behaviour "Occurred subsequently, insidiously until the suspension last October."

Although the former director of Youth Protection alleges several other events related to psychological harassment, the court notes that her representative describes three other situations that may be a combination of events and be considered an unforeseen and sudden event, namely the exclusion of the worker from a committee, the performance evaluation of August 2017 and the meeting with a view to an administrative suspension on October 16, 2017.

With regard to the right of management, the court must assess whether the employer exercises its powers in a rational and reasonable manner, in good faith and without abusing them. In the decision, the judge writes that the employer's right of management includes great discretion in the direction and control of activities. "He can exercise his right of management firmly and even make mistakes," wrote the judge.

On all the events mentioned, the court considers that Connie Jacques may have been authoritarian and clumsy in certain interventions, but recalls that the right of management can be exercised firmly and that it includes the right to make mistakes as long as it is not abusive or unreasonable.

Thus, in the absence of an unforeseen and sudden event, the court concludes that Ms. Perron did not suffer an occupational injury in October 2017.

The Gaspé Peninsula CISSS declined a request for a response.

For her part, Diane Perron, now retired, considers that an employer's right to management is unquestionably legitimate, but it is not without limits and must be carried out rigorously and in compliance with the policies and procedures in force.

She recalls that in 2018, following a CNESST investigation into psychological harassment, confirmed psychological harassment in the situation on the part of her superior, Connie Jacques.

Police report

Jennifer Labrie, 26, from Cap-Chat, will remain in custody until her bail hearing on February 24 at the New Carlisle Courthouse. She last appeared in court on January 16, when her bail hearing date was set. With no prior criminal record, Ms. Labrie is believed to be involved in a November 24 shooting at a Port Daniel-Gasccons home. Her alleged accomplice is Maxime Hamilton, 28, also from Cap-Chat. He and another alleged accomplice, Réjean Couturier, 49, from New Richmond, are facing charges of possession and unloading a prohibited weapon, a .20 calibre sawed-off firearm, wearing a disguise and breaking and entering. Maxime Hamilton will also return to court on February 24, while Réjean Couturier will appear in front of the tribunal the following day. Jennifer Labrie and Maxime Hamilton were arrested in Cap-Chat on December 12 during a drug bust.

Réjean Couturier, who was arrested on December 17 in New Richmond, faces additional charges of breaching conditions, breach of probation, possession of a weapon when prohibited and possession of drugs for the purpose of trafficking. The Sûreté du Québec investigation is ongoing, and police believe that the activities of the three individuals are related to recent incidents surrounding drug trafficking in the Gaspé Peninsula.

Quebec police services, in collaboration with Contrôle routier Québec and the Fédération des clubs de motoneigistes du Québec (FCMQ), conducted interventions on January 25 and 26 as part of a province-wide operation targeting snowmobilers whose behaviour could compromise their safety and that of other users.

Police officers, FCMQ trail surveillance officers and road controllers conducted these interventions on trails or where they intersect with public roads to ensure equipment is properly secured when transported on Quebec roads. The operation aimed to remind snowmobilers of the various laws and regulations governing off-road vehicles, whether under the Off-Road Vehicles Act, the Highway Safety Code or the Criminal Code.

An awareness campaign is also underway across the social media platforms of police organizations. This campaign reminds off-road vehicle users of the importance of respecting the laws in force and adopting prudent behaviour at all times. This new campaign will be rolled out under the theme "On the trails, I take responsibility."

The Sûreté du Québec and its partners took the opportunity to share some safety tips as the season is slowly picking up.

It is recommended to avoid going on an excursion alone and always notify a loved one of the planned route. Before heading out, plan the trip and check the status of the network by using iMontoneige. Snowmobilers should respect the signs and adjust their speed according to the trail conditions, maintain a safe distance between snowmobiles and keep all vehicle headlights on, including the red rear parking light.

It is also highly recommended to cross public roads only where signs allow, stay to the right of trails at all times, always wear a helmet and wear safety glasses if the helmet does not have a visor. Snowmobilers should respect private property by obtaining the owner's permission to ride or remain on trails.

Driving ability impaired by alcohol, drugs or a combination of both, along with speed are the main causes of fatal snowmobile collisions. According to the Sûreté du Québec, no snowmobilers lost their life during the 2024 edition of this concerted effort.

"That at the end of the TAT (Tribunal administratif du travail, which deals with labour issues) process, whether it is judged otherwise, it is the prerogative of the TAT and we can only respect that," mentions Ms. Perron, who notes in passing that the process lasted six years, from 2018 to 2024.

She considers that a lot of insights emerged from it that exposed rather inconsistent and dubious details on certain hierarchical management practices. "We will recall the investigation report of the Auditor General of Quebec, in 2022, which

lifted the veil on several major shortcomings in the management practices of the Gaspé Peninsula CISSS concerning managers as well as the deficient compliance with several of its regulations," she notes. Ms. Perron says she has been approached a few times about other stories of workplace harassment similar to hers, even by people she did not know. She claims to have seen people who were "Totally at the end of their rope," physically and psychologically, in distress, openly

Cont'd on page 8



Gilles Gagné

Commentary

Where does Canada go from here?

Canada's main commercial partner, the United States, is run by a liar, Donald Trump, who has a criminal record, who has abused women, who regularly shows a misogynist side, who is a fraudster and who accepts in his entourage Elon Musk, who encourages a German neo-Nazi party.

On January 20, during Donald Trump's inauguration ceremony, Elon Musk did not hesitate to make two Adolf Hitler salutes.

That factor, and Donald Trump's intimidation tactics, essentially based on lies or gross exaggerations, set the tone of Canada's upcoming trade talks with the United States.

So far, those "talks" have essentially taken the form of a monologue, a rant repeated tirelessly by Trump, whether as a president-elect or since his inauguration.

That inauguration was deprived of what Canadians had been told since November 26, that the new American administration would impose tariffs of 25% on a significant set of goods coming from the United States' biggest economic partner, Canada.

But tariffs will be imposed, probably on February 1, and probably not to the tune of 25% right off the bat, more likely when Donald Trump decides that this is the best moment to destabilize Canadians and their government. This is his way of dealing.

In the meantime, on January 23, during the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, the American president used an international stage, although his intervention was made remotely from the United States, to badmouth Canada, telling the world how tough a commercial partner Canada is.

Well, thanks for the compliment, because in Trump's world, toughness in business is positive.

Measured toughness will be necessary

In Davos, Trump hammered once more, as he

had done earlier that week, that the United States doesn't need Canada's lumber, cars and oil.

He was lying again. Of course, the Americans won't die if they can no longer count on Canada's automobile industry, wood and hydrocarbons.

However, the United States automobile cluster will have to deeply review its supply chain if it has to function without Canadian parts or manufactured cars, as both countries have built an intermingled industry.

That reorganization, if it happens, which is unlikely because it would take years, will have a cost, and that toll will be paid by consumers.

Lumber? The United States is about 70% self-sufficient in that field. Most of the remaining 30% comes in the form of imports from Canada. If Trump is the dealer he pretends to be, he will understand that his country cannot cope without 25 or 30% of its lumber supply without finding another partner or finding substitute products for wood. Will that new partner be exempted from tariffs? It would be surprising unless Trump really wants to pass on a message of contempt to Canada, which is highly possible. Anyway, lumber prices will undoubtedly increase south of the border if tariffs are imposed on Canadian wood.

Oil and gas? Canada's hydrocarbon exports to the U.S., not only from Alberta, reach close to \$150 billion annually. Although American companies could produce more and make up for Canadian hydrocarbons, again, such an occurrence would stimulate inflation because the rush to increase the U.S. capacity would necessitate significant investments. Donald Trump should know oil companies well enough to understand that they are far from charities. They will not reduce oil prices if they invest a lot.

Donald Trump won the November 5 election because there were enough Americans who thought that immigration and inflation were the country's main problems. He is in a hurry to apply his platform because the control he has over the Congress right now might vanish two years down the road, with the mid-term elections.

Targeting economic sectors like the automobile industry, lumber and hydrocarbons with the imposition of tariffs will generate inflation and represent a sure shot at triggering intense dissatisfaction south of the border. Will Trump care about that? There is nothing certain.

In front of the Davos audience, he failed to mention Canadian aluminum and food. It was either because adding that would have required too much

intellectual effort, or because he is already starting to listen to American business lobbyists asking him to adopt a softer approach, due to the harm his loose-cannon declarations are triggering.

It will hurt

The tariffs Donald Trump will impose on Canada will hurt, no doubt. The Canadian government, made vulnerable because Prime Minister Justin Trudeau decided to leave too late, has nevertheless shown a decent approach since the beginning of the year, by drawing three lists of American products that will be hit by tariffs when the Americans implement theirs.

There will be a price to pay for Canadians. The country, using an image, reaches a junior level compared to the senior status of our southern neighbours, whose economy is ten times bigger than ours.

We cannot compete in strength, but we can still hold our own if we show a blend of firmness and diplomatic skills. We will have to act quickly after the announcement of American tariffs and impose ours.

We will also have to work seriously at expanding our exchanges with other trade partners to reduce our dependence on the United States.

We have to work with Mexico, already our trade partner in NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement, which is due to be renegotiated in 2026, despite Trump's decrees that will affect its importance.



Reaching better trade exchanges with European and Asian countries is therefore compulsory.

In 2000, 75% of Canada's exports were sent to the United States, a situation facilitated by the fact that the Canadian dollar was only worth about 62 cents in American currency. The simplicity in dealing with the U.S. was denounced back then because Canadians were putting themselves in a vulnerable situation.

Twenty-five years later, we are still sending 75% of our exports down south, and we are more vulnerable than at any point in the last 100 years or so.

One of the things we have running for us is that our debt load per capita is significantly lower than that of other industrialized countries. We have a bit of wiggle room to compensate the companies that will suffer from trade tariffs.

Donald Trump thinks he is a great dealer. His tactics could motivate his trade partners to show him that he is, above all, a bad poker player.

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Train will not go to Gaspé before the end of 2027

NELSON SERGERIE
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

GASPÉ- The Quebec Department of Transport is once again postponing the deadline to rehabilitate the reopening of the railroad to Gaspé, now targeting the fall of 2027.

In 2017, the provincial government promised to reach Gaspé in 2022. Then it was 2026, 2025, then 2026 again and now, all the regional stakeholders in the file estimate that the terminus of the line will not see its first train until the fall of 2027.

"It is a disappointment," says Gaspé Mayor Daniel Côté, who participated in a rail work monitoring committee with the authorities of the Quebec Ministry of Transport on January 22.

"We're being told about 2027 in the broad sense, but I would venture to assume that it's probably later than 2027," Daniel Côté continued.

For several weeks now, two major calls for tenders remain suspended by Transports Québec.

On January 22, the Ministry of Transport announced that it was cancelling these calls for tenders, citing significant differences with the estimated budget required.

The first call launched on March 21 faced nine postponements, and bids were only opened on September 18.

Pomerleau submitted a bid for \$258 million, while Parténariat Ferroviaire Gaspésie suggested \$286 million to complete the work.

The work involves repairing two bridges in Gascons, another between Gascons and Newport, one in Newport, and one in Douglstown. In addition, a bridge in Grande-Rivière was to be replaced, and a retaining wall in Pabos Mills is also part of the bid.

The contract duration was estimated at 28 months, according to the call for tenders.

Another revised contract,

which had originally provided for the repair or construction of nine infrastructure projects, but for which the price request was ultimately only for bridges, has also been dropped.

The targeted sites were a small bridge in Pabos Mills, the Grand Pabos River bridge, the Pabos River bridge, the Barachois bridge and the road bridge on Highway 132 in Barachois.

The Ministry of Transport had removed the four retaining walls at Anse-à-Beaufils and Sandy Beach from the project. The ministry indicated that the revised contract was estimated at over \$50 million.

On August 28, Pomerleau submitted the lowest proposal of \$79 million.

Hamel Construction, the only other bidder, was asking for \$83.8 million.

For the first contract, involving nine structures, only Pomerleau had submitted a bid of \$104 million.

"Consequently, the ministry will review its planning for awarding contracts with the aim of completing the entire project. As such, the design and the strategy for grouping the work will be reviewed with the aim of obtaining more competitive bids during the next calls for tenders," the ministry said in a January 22 press release. At the end of this review, it will be possible to present a new completion schedule for the remaining work between Port-Daniel-Gascons and Gaspé.

"Everything is being done to complete all the work up to Gaspé as quickly as possible," the ministry added.

"This is the process we got bogged down in. The time it takes to get out of the process is time we're not spending doing work. That largely explains why the work is delayed and why we're disappointed," says Mayor Côté.

The total of the tenders could now surpass \$517 million, the sum budgeted by

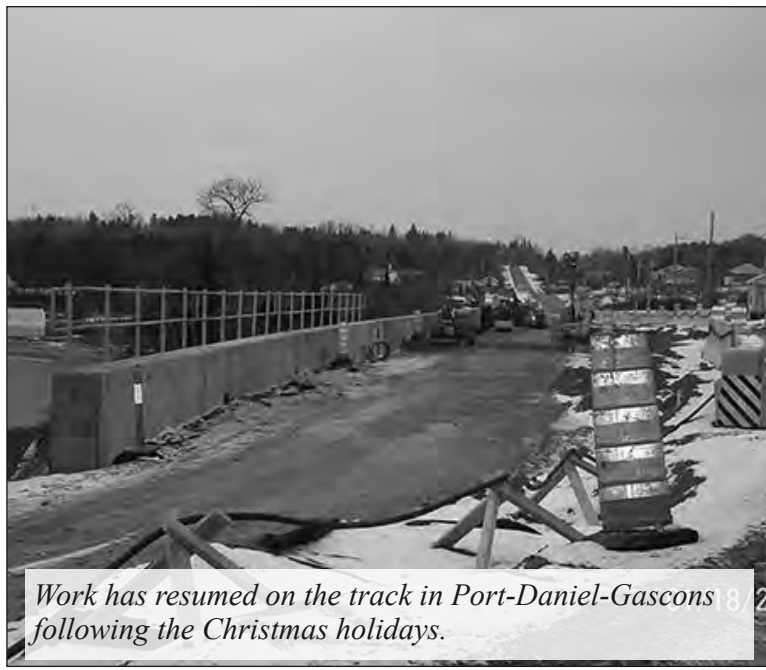


Photo: Courtesy Anthony Bernard Prince

Transports Québec for the Port Daniel-Gaspé stretch of railroad. Some contracts have already been awarded on that section.

Not a surprise

"It (another delay) is not really a surprise. We've seen it coming for a while, knowing that barely 50% of the contracts were awarded on the third section and that there were calls for tender rejected. It was inevitable," comments the president of the Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie, Éric Dubé. "To meet the 2026 deadline, all the work would have had to be given in 2024," adds Mr. Dubé.

"The calls for tenders compared to the estimates have exploded. When they are not able to explain the discrepancies and with the leeway they can afford, they have to find solutions to return to calls for tenders," he continues.

"What will be important is for the ministry to come out with calls for tenders as soon as possible so as not to lose another year," says Mr. Dubé.

The ministry mentioned this coming spring. "The definition of spring is not a specific date. Will it be April? May? We want it as soon as possible to have an answer as quickly as possible. We will just know when the calls for tenders open if there will be other delays. We have just lost 2024," says President Dubé.

In an ideal world, bids should be called in February so as not to lose 2025. "They are working very hard to go to calls for tenders so as not to lose another year," continued Mr. Dubé.

The Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie could be asked to do more work to give a boost to the rehabilitation.

"We think we can minimize costs. The ministry came to us

with an additional bridge in Caplan since the section will not be open before June. It's a big project and we will be able to deliver. That's the role we can play to help," says Mr. Dubé.

The superstructures will not be able to be built by the company, but the culverts and level crossings could be taken care of.

One billion dollars?

Will a budget of \$1 billion be needed to complete the entire refurbishment?

"We asked ourselves whether additional funds will be needed. As long as that is not known, it will be difficult to ask for more until we have spent all the money we have. The ministry is working on the objective of carrying out the necessary work. Until all calls for tenders are open, it's difficult to speculate. We're not there yet," Mr. Dubé analyzes. The work will continue in 2025 on six sites between Port-Daniel-Gascons and Gaspé.

The interventions include the reconstruction of seven structures (five bridges and two walls), the rehabilitation of 18 structures, the relocation of track in three sectors, the replacement of more than 120 culverts, protection work against coastal erosion and submersion and interventions on the components of the railway for the entire section, with changes of ties as well as ballasting and levelling work.

Section two between Caplan and Port-Daniel-Gascons should be put into service this spring.

Can we believe in 2027 for Gaspé? "It will depend on how quickly the ministry awards contracts for the third section by summer. Otherwise, we will lose another year," says Mr. Dubé.

"We have political assurances that the file will be settled and that the last section to Gaspé will not be abandoned even if there were delays and additional costs," says Daniel Côté.

Economic development

The postponement of another year to reach Gaspé will have impacts on the economic development of the Rocher-Percé and Côte-de-Gaspé MRCs.

The ministry asked the company to find out if this announcement will have financial impacts on it. "Everything east of the cement plant, we have not yet quantified the impacts since we are one year behind. We will have to do the exercise. We will have to talk with the companies and the economic departments of the MRCs concerned to see what they had in their book," says Mr. Dubé.

It will have no impact on the Mines Gaspé revival project in Murdochville since exploitation is planned for around 2030.

The picture could be different for LM Wind Power in Gaspé, which now manufactures smaller blades, the size of the blades that were previously transported by truck to New Richmond to be placed on a train.

"This is an issue that we will have to quantify. Knowing that we would be in Port-Daniel in 2025, rather than bringing them to New Richmond, we have to see if we can transship them closer to the manufacturing point. It's a bit like when we started transshipping them in New Richmond: we were supposed to do it for two years. We did it for six years," says Mr. Dubé.

"It's a thorn in the side," says Daniel Côté when asked about the credibility of the rehabilitation schedule that has been postponed again.

"It always sounds a bit strange for companies for whom deadlines are important. We don't necessarily have a million companies running after us. We can't guarantee 2026-2027." We have to postpone it to 2027. It has an impact on our credibility in our town and our region. There are elements over which we have no control other than to exert pressure. We continue to exert pressure, but there are things that are beyond our control, but it is certain that it has an impact on our credibility," adds the mayor of Gaspé.



The president of the Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie, Éric Dubé.

Photo: N. Sergerie

Langlois-Chandler saga exceeds \$400,000

NELSON SERGERIE
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

CHANDLER - The saga surrounding the Town of Chandler's claim against former Mayor Louisette Langlois has cost the Town more than \$400,000 in legal fees to date, while no date has yet been set for the case.

For the period from October to December 2024, the total legal costs amounted to \$29,984.95. The firm GBC Avocats, to which Charles Caza, the attorney for the former mayor is part, billed \$16,542.67. The Town's representation, Morency Avocats, issued an invoice for \$13,442.28.

The Percé courthouse clerk's office issued the certificate of completeness on January 7.

The parties are now awaiting a hearing date for the ap-



Former Chandler Mayor Louisette Langlois in September 2021.

Photo: N. Sergerie

plication.

In January 2021, the council adopted a resolution leading to the filing of the claim by the Town, emphasizing in particular that the accusations against Louisette Langlois resulted from serious or intentional misconduct, by giving precedence to her personal in-

terest, by having committed actions intentionally and premeditatedly, all to achieve her ends.

The argument was repeated in the motion for an originating application for reimbursement of defence costs filed in January 2022, which sought

\$230,411 in reimbursement.

Chandler's attorneys mentioned in particular that "The decision rendered (...) on December 21, 2020, is damning concerning the defendant and establishes that the defendant's acts or omissions are serious and/or intentional and/or separable from the exercise of her functions."

They added that the former mayor "Has multiplied the procedures, some of which are unnecessary, unfounded and truncated in light of the evidence presented before the CMQ (Commission municipale du Québec)."

In December 2019, Louisette Langlois was cited for 21 breaches of the Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct of Chandler Elected Officials. After hearings in July 2020, the Commission concluded that the former mayor was guilty of 20 breaches, in-

cluding conflicts of interest, in December 2020. Before the sanction hearing, Ms. Langlois attempted to obtain a stay of proceedings, and contested the notice of sanction issued against her, going so far as to ask to reopen the investigation, requests that were rejected by administrative Judge Sandra Bilodeau.

The former mayor went to the Superior Court, where she was dismissed in July 2021, and suffered the same fate in October 2021 before the Court of Appeal.

In addition, the motion accused her of having multiplied the procedures thereafter.

The Town has adjusted its claim to more than \$300,000 and is now including the costs incurred in the ongoing legal proceedings.

The total bill for this saga has now reached \$404,786.

Dominique Giroux will run for mayor of Chandler

NELSON SERGERIE
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

CHANDLER - Following whispers among several circles in the Town of Chandler, the former head of aquatic activities for the town, Dominique Giroux, has officially confirmed that she will be a candidate for mayor in the November municipal election. "I spoke with my family, and people around me. It's a great challenge. I've been thinking about it since 2021. I had this thought during the holidays and people are encouraging me," says the avowed candidate.

She wants to develop and, above all, bring people together in the town. "I'm approaching sixty. What drives me is the challenge. I have to do it. That's what drives me to create harmony. Chandler is the locomotive of the MRC. What has been done is well done, but I want to bring a breath of fresh air," she be-



Dominique Giroux.

Photo: Courtesy of Dominique Giroux

lieves.

"I'm not promising the moon. I just want to bring people together and develop," she adds, not wanting to comment on the specific objectives at this point in her candidacy.

"I'm working on things. I don't want to promise anything. I just want to improve things," says Ms. Giroux, who has rejected any connection with the saga surrounding Sauvetage adrénaline.

"We have to move forward. This is a settled, finished file. I don't hold a grudge. If I had held a grudge, I wouldn't have run. I won't hide from you that it was a difficult time. I'm not going there for revenge," says Ms. Giroux.

"I'm going there to develop." I've moved on, Maybe there are people who haven't moved on, but I've moved on," the candidate emphasizes broadly.

In January 2024, an arbitrator upheld the Town of Chandler's decision to dismiss Ms. Giroux after she implemented a system of free classes without council authorization. The classes were linked to sponsorships received through Sauvetage adrénaline, an organization she co-managed.

In the administrative investigation conducted by the town, the arbitrator found that the free classes were not limited to the four classes identified in 2016. In practice, they were granted for all activities. This is

the case, for example, for renting a gym, yoga or music classes, and even packages for children's parties.

From 2019 to 2022, the value of the discounts granted to sponsors for activities not authorized by the town amounts to more than \$6,000, according to the arbitration decision.

However, the arbitrator cancelled the three-day suspension

imposed on December 6, 2022, and ordered the town to pay the lost salary and benefits with interest.

In February 2023, the council passed a resolution clarifying that, as part of the 2016 partnership, the town had agreed to grant free participation in certain activities at the sports complex to certain donors.

However, the resolution

also noted that the town wished to maximize revenue from activity registrations due to the high costs of operating the sports complex, which is owned by the René-Lévesque School Services Centre. Losses for the 2022 fiscal year were reported to be \$310,000.

Outgoing Mayor Gilles Daraïche has already announced his intention to seek a second term as mayor.

\$5.2M to renovate the Chandler swimming pool

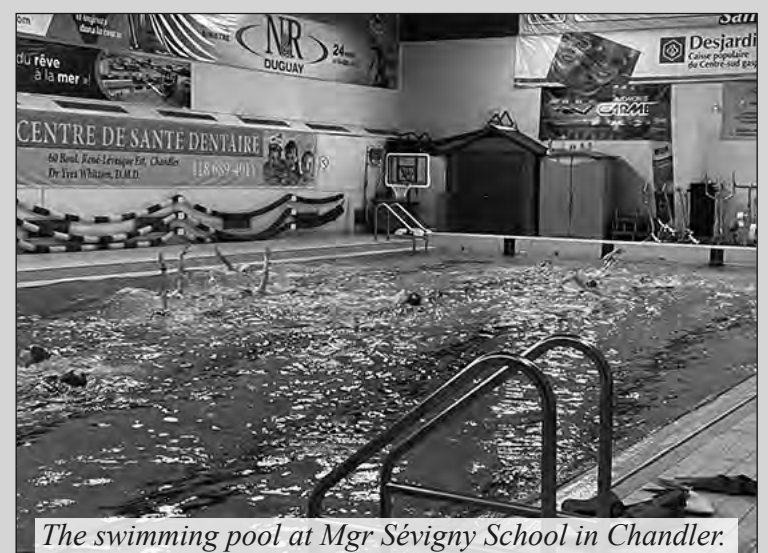
NELSON SERGERIE

CHANDLER - The Chandler swimming pool is set to undergo a \$ 5.2-million renovation in the coming months.

The Ministry of Education will cover the cost of upgrading the facility, which belongs to the René-Lévesque School Services Centre and is located in Mgr Sévigny High School.

"We are talking about renovating the pool's changing rooms and some of the pool's mechanical equipment. Everything will be done between January and August. The pool will be shut down for the duration of the work," explains CSS René-Lévesque Director General Sandra Nicol.

The partnership with the Town of Chandler will con-



The swimming pool at Mgr Sévigny School in Chandler.

Photo: Archives

tinue, ensuring access to other sports facilities.

Citizens will still have access to the Mgr Sévigny school gymnasium. In addition, they'll also be able to use the Saint-Joseph school gymnasium as well.

Before the holidays, the Town acknowledged it had no alternative options for aquatic activities.

The nearest pools are located in Gaspé and Bonaventure, both over 90 kilometres away from Chandler.

First winter cruise in Gaspé after a decade of efforts

NELSON SERGERIE
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

GASPÉ - The first winter cruise ship arrived in Gaspé on January 21 at noon.

The Commandant Charcot of the Ponant cruise line anchored at the Sandy Beach wharf in a project that had been on the table since 2018.

The ship is carrying 153 passengers on this inaugural winter cruise, sailing through the St. Lawrence on its journey.

This stopover is the first of five scheduled by the shipowner between now and March 9.

"It's happening. It's taking shape. We can't wait. We're on the lookout." We're looking forward to it," said Destination Gaspé's Port of Call director, Igor Urban, a few hours before its arrival.

The ship was docked at the wharf for 24 hours, a rare occurrence during summer cruises in Gaspé. The lack of snow forced the organization to adjust the activities offered to passengers.

The guests went snowshoeing in Forillon Park, met with the Micmac Nation of Gespeg, and took part in an interpretation activity on Gaspesian plants in Coin-du-Banc.

"Backcountry skiing was planned, but potentially with the February 4 and 5 stopover, this activity will be on the agenda once again," said Mr. Urban. "We're adapting," he said.

The organization mobilized



The Commandant Charcot preparing to dock at the Sandy Beach wharf on January 21.

Photo: N. Sergerie

extra staff to ensure a proper welcome for the cruise ship passengers.

"It requires a little more effort because it's outside of what we usually do. But people responded. We had all our guides and our people at the reception. We are really happy. We also feel a mobilization at the team level," mentions Mr. Urban.

A significant first also occurred during this inaugural winter stop.

"For the first time, we had a resupply. The ship comes from Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon. It had crossed the Atlantic before starting its stay in the St. Lawrence. They needed food and instead of resupplying in the big centres, they chose to do it in Gaspé," explained Mr. Urban.

In total, 15 pallets of food

had to be transported on the ship.

"Usually, we can help out with eggs or things like that, but here, we are in a real ship's grocery store. We had been warned two weeks ago. The Port of Gaspé was proactive," he explains.

The shipment included trout and Gaspé salmon.

In total, 503 people will visit Gaspé during the ship's five scheduled stopovers, according to current reservations, marking a historic chapter for the region.

"This is a pilot year. The company will see how it goes and if everything works to their liking and the passengers are happy, it could come back in 2027. Other cruise companies that also offer winter activities are looking at what is happen-

ing right now. It's a double benefit for us," says Mr. Urban.

Other companies have already shown interest in the destination. "In April 2024, we were already being asked questions by other companies. It's something that is being ob-

served," says Mr. Urban as shipowners inquired about the situation at a cruise convention in Miami.

Looking ahead, for the 2025 summer season, 19 ships have confirmed visits so far, with a total of 12,579 passengers expected. The season will run from May 11 to October 27.

"We will receive slightly fewer ships in 2025. There may be changes. That is why the calendar is not official. We expected it. It is due to a transition in the organization of cruises. 2025 is the result of 2022. We are already seeing an increase in 2026 and we are talking about 26 cruises booked for the moment," notes the port manager.

In 2024, Escale Gaspésie welcomed 7,405 cruise passengers during the summer season.

The season wrapped up on October 28 with 22 ships, but since the boats are smaller and more luxurious, the attendance statistics were affected.

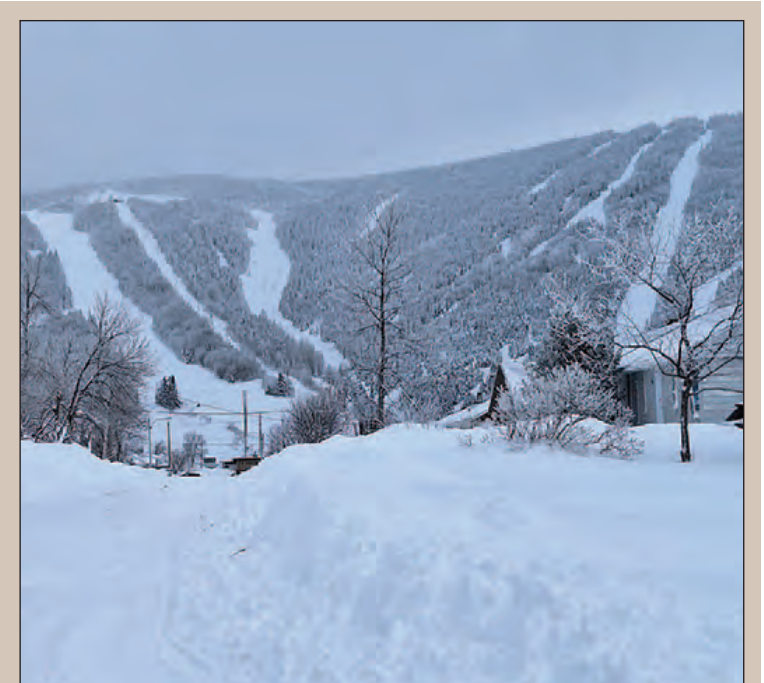


Photo: N. Sergerie

There is a lot of snow on the ground in Murdochville and on Mount Miller.

Snowy Murdochville

Nelson Sergerie

MURDOCHVILLE - While there are only six centimetres of snow on the ground in Gaspé as of January 14, and parts of the Bay of Chaleur area are snow-free, Murdochville feels like it's from another planet.

The mining town received more than 80 centimetres of snow in the week of January 6, to the delight of ski and snowmobile enthusiasts.

The local snowmobile club has groomed Trail 597, noting that it is possible to snowmobile from Rimouski to Petit-Cap, near Gaspé.

Elsewhere, the lack of snow is preventing trail work. Despite appearances, Gaspé is not far behind: according to Environment Canada, 109 centimetres have fallen so far since the start of winter. The normal amount by January 31 is 115 centimetres.

The warmer temperatures have melted the roughly 75 centimetres received in December in Gaspé.

Since January 1, Gaspé has received 22 centimetres of snow (as of January 14): the normal amount is 80 centimetres.

Start of a new tourism chapter

NELSON SERGERIE

GASPÉ - The start of winter cruises in Gaspé could serve as a catalyst to stimulate four-season tourism, a goal that has been under consideration for decades in the Gaspé Peninsula.

That's what Gaspé Mayor Daniel Côté believes, as the Commandant Charcot of the Conant cruise line docked for the first time on January 21 at the Sandy Beach wharf following a decade of tourism efforts.

"I think that winter cruises are a bit of a prelude to four-season tourism. Our industry is getting ready under the impetus of Destination Gaspé. We have snowmobiles, we can have cruises now, in short, we are starting to pre-

pare for real four-season tourism," says the mayor.

Mr. Côté is trying to define what the next 10 years will be like. "Right now, we're gravitating around snowmobiling or skiing at a more local level. The Chic-Chocs are considered the Rockies of the East. We could get closer to something like that, assuming that climate change is less intense. I dare to assume that if we work on a winter offer, it will bear fruit," analyzes Mr. Côté.

He notes that cruise passengers take the risk of coming to us in a place where everything is in development. "They take this risk, but on the other hand, they put us on the map," he continues.

The region must take charge. "We must offer more things in terms of snowmobil-

ing, for example: offer rentals or other elements of the type where we are much less structured like the Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean region. To build a structure, you need a clientele, and the cruise clientele offers an interesting base," maintains Mr. Côté.

"We must take a clear position. We have a magnificent four-season region. Let's take advantage of our advantages," concludes the mayor.

The Commandant Charcot left the Sandy Beach wharf on January 22 at noon.

Four other stops are planned between now and March 9, for a total of just over 500 passengers who will have paid \$30,000 each for this first experience in the Gaspé Peninsula.

New petition to dismiss the Gespeg council

NELSON SERGERIE

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

GASPÉ – The Gespeg Elders Circle is launching a new petition, this time demanding the dismissal of the council that was elected in September.

The elders claim to have received evidence showing that the decision not to mail out an election notice to all members was an administrative decision by its general manager, Connie Jacques, which deprived several members of the Nation of their right to vote.

“They didn’t follow the most important thing, which is to make sure that everyone in our community has the right to vote,” states spokesperson Linda Jean.

The council has told the elders that it is not their decision. The Election Review Committee has responded to a request from a candidate for the position of chief. “The Chair of the Election agreed with Gespeg management that the Nation of Gespeg would forward all the documents produced by the Chair of the Election because the Nation’s leaders had all the information on the members’ contact information and were already aware of the functional transmission methods for vot-



Photo: N. Sergerie

The Elders circle announced its intention on January 21.

ers,” said Ms. Jean, reading from a response sent to Mark Sinnett.

Mr. Sinnett stated that the council must give the mandate to the Chair of the Elections, as governance cannot be involved in the process.

“The management made the decision not to do mailouts due to costs. That’s what we were told. They were very aware of our custom of sending mailouts to all members so that all members have the information,” said Mr. Sinnett.

Thus, the decision ultimately rested with the general manager, Connie Jacques. “The basic element that triggered our work is the fact that our members were not informed that there were elections,” added Mr. Sinnett.

The Department of Indigenous Services Canada was not been approached, as Gespeg is not governed by the Indian Act for elections but by its own membership code.

“Now, I believe that we can take steps after two public outings (during which their concerns were expressed). We have a lawyer who is guiding us and helping us steer the ship,” said Ms. Jean.

The petition also mentions the need for the Council to be placed under trusteeship by the Government of Canada because the reading of the financial statements does not demonstrate the reality and shows poor management of the Nation’s funds.

The group states that the Nation’s cash flow went from

\$6 million in 2022 to only \$2 million in 2024, with a deficit of \$917,000 in the last year.

For the petition to be admissible, 206 signatures are required, or 50% + 1 of the 411 voters who participated in the September election.

Last fall, the first petition that gathered more than 375 signatures from Gespeg members was rejected. The council responded that the document had to be filed with the Presi-

dent of Elections.

During discussions at the annual general meeting on November 24, the current council confirmed that it was remaining in office, despite the wishes of the members. According to the council, all the rules of the electoral code were respected and, consequently, their election is legitimate.

Ms. Jean is confident that this second petition will be successful. “The beauty of our committee is that we are here for our children and grandchildren. We are doing this because there are currently seven people who manage the building at the political level, without having had an adequate election, in our opinion,” says the spokesperson. Contrary to current custom, Gespeg elders are not entitled to the same respect as in other Aboriginal communities. “It’s crystal clear,” concludes Ms. Jean.

YOUTH PROTECTION:

▶ *Cont'd from page 3*

threatened with reprisals or already experiencing them, who said they were forced to sign confidentiality agreements regarding various issues of management abuse to avoid

reprisals.

The former Member of the National Assembly for Bonaventure, Sylvain Roy, has also received similar comments to those mentioned by Ms. Perron while he was a member of the National Assembly.

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Transports Québec says new railroad bed will be safe in the New Carlisle-Paspebiac area, despite apparent cavity

GILLES GAGNÉ

NEW CARLISLE – In December, Saint-Siméon-based photographer, video producer and drone pilot Allen Shaw captured images of the railroad upgrading works in the New Carlisle-Paspebiac area. He frequently shoots videos and photos of that operation.

He noticed a spot where there seemed to be an overhang, or a cavity, whose size is hard to assess from the air. Mr. Shaw shared the photo and some observers are of the view that it looks like a significant overhang.

The SPEC asked Transports Québec, the owner of the line, whether this overhang poses a safety concern. The reply came from the ministry's spokesperson, Sophie Gaudreault.

"I would like to remind you that because of the erosion of the cliff, the work carried out

in the New Carlisle sector, as part of the Gaspésie Railway rehabilitation project, required the relocation of the railway and the construction of retaining walls to protect it from coastal hazards. The rock face in the area was analyzed by the Ministry's geotechnical and rock mechanic experts. The latter has a complete portrait of the condition of the cliffs on the section between Caplan and Port-Daniel-Gascons, including a digital terrain model showing the characteristics of the cavities present in the cliff at New Carlisle, in particular the depth of the cavity versus the positioning of the track. These elements were taken into consideration during the design," replied Ms. Gaudreault. "Despite the presence of cavities, the experts confirm the solidity of the wall to support the new railway line, and that the new location takes into account the setbacks calculated for the



Photo: Douglas Allen Shaw

There seems to be an overhang along the cliff in the New Carlisle-Paspebiac area.

coming decades. As a result of this analysis, the Department does not plan to extend the riprap under the retaining wall to the east. Once the work is completed and the commissioning is completed, the trains

will be able to run safely. As with all of the Department's infrastructure, a maintenance, protection and monitoring program will be put in place to ensure the sustainability of the track," concludes Sophie Gau-

dreault.

The line is expected to re-open between New Carlisle and Port Daniel's cement plant at some point toward the end of the spring or the beginning of the summer.



Photo: G. Gagné

The ice floe is late in taking shape in Pointe-à-la-Garde and Escuminac.

Milder temperatures result in later ice floes

GILLES GAGNÉ

POINTE-À-LA-GARDE – It is an understatement to say that, over the last few years, the ice floe has been slow to form in the Pointe-à-la-Garde, Escuminac and Miguasha sectors. Smelt fishing, whether for leisure or commercial purposes, is once again at the mercy of mild weather. Some seasons have been nearly entirely wasted or reduced to such a short period that many people were unable to fish smelt and it was difficult to

find them in grocery stores.

Mild temperatures in December 2024 and the beginning of January 2025 highly discouraging. As of January 17, there was practically no ice formed in the Pointe-à-la-Garde inlet, except for a few metres along the shore. The colder weather that started on January 20 helped somewhat, explains Escuminac resident and former Member of the National Assembly for Bonaventure, Sylvain Roy.

"I was able to step on the ice yesterday (January 22).

The trick is to go when there is not much water depth under the ice. I brought my kayak too, just in case. I think this ice will stay for a while because there is no mild weather called soon. I am building a little shanty with canvas. I think the era of big shanties or trailers is gone. As for fish, I didn't catch one! The new moon will bring fish, come the end of January and the beginning of February. It comes with big tides. You have to fish when the tide is low," explained Mr. Roy.

No Thanks, Pozzolan Dalhousie holds screening of documentary *Malartic*

GILLES GAGNÉ

POINTE-À-LA-CROIX – The citizen group No Thanks, Pozzolan Dalhousie is organizing a public screening of the documentary *Malartic* at the Pointe-à-la-Croix Multipurpose Centre, located at 42 Lasalle Street, on January 31, 2025, at 5:30 p.m. (Quebec time).

After several months of mobilization against the EcoRock Dalhousie open-pit pozzolan mine project, the citizen group believes it is important to bring together activists and residents from both sides of Chaleur Bay in a friendly setting where participants can discuss the issue at hand and get to know each other. The evening will begin with a presentation of the EcoRock project and the No Thanks, Pozzolan Dalhousie group, followed by a screening of the documentary. Afterwards, a discussion will be held on the content of the film, the current state of affairs and future actions.

Participants are invited to arrive at 4 p.m. and are encouraged to bring their own drinks and snacks.

The documentary *Malartic* was produced by Nicolas Paquet, who points out that 10 years after the opening of the enormous open-pit gold mine in Malartic, the expected economic miracle is nothing more than a mirage. Noting the glaring gap between the decline of the town and the wealth of the mining company, Mr. Paquet reveals the workings of an opaque decision-making system where the citizen population has no say. Between an anthropological study and an investigation into the heart of power, *Malartic* poses the universal question of the democratic management of the territory.

Those interested in the event can visit the Facebook page Non merci, Pozzolan Dalhousie and follow the event: Screening of the documentary *Malartic* | Screening of the documentary *Malartic*.

THEGASPESPEC.COM

Gaspé Peninsula: 8th consecutive year of positive net migration

GILLES GAGNÉ

CARLETON — The Gaspé Peninsula and Magdalen Islands region continues to experience a positive net migration, according to the most recent data from the Institut de la statistique du Québec. This factor was crucial in the region's population increase for the eighth consecutive year, with an increase of 486 people in 2023-2024.

Quebec's Statistic Institute collects its data between July 1 of one year and June 30 of the following year. This 486-person gain is the highest, proportionally, among Quebec's remote regions. Furthermore, all Regional County Muni-

Population increases in 2023-2024

Magdalen Islands	49
Rocher-Percé MRC	48
Côte-de-Gaspé MRC	81
Haute-Gaspésie MRC	46
Bonaventure MRC	96
Avignon MRC	125
REGIONAL TOTAL	486

palities (MRCs) within the region saw growth.

Over the past four years, the population of the Gaspé Peninsula and the Magdalen Islands has increased from 89,865 to 92,336 people, a gain of 2,471 people, an average increase of 618 people annually.

One of the main aspects of demographics is intra-provincial migration, which refers to population movements within Quebec. The Gaspé Peninsula and the Magdalen Islands performed well in that area, with a net gain of 437 people.

"We are proud to see the evolution of the Gaspé Peninsula in recent years, continuing to stand out demographically. This is exceptional work on the part of all stakeholders in the community (...) for the demographics of the region. Their commitment and sustained work make it possible to obtain results that last over time," emphasizes Danik O'Connor, director of the Stratégie Vivre en Gaspésie.

This organization has been working for years to promote the region, particularly by

highlighting priority employment needs.

"With the need for labour that we know today in the region, we are delighted to see significant gains in the active population of all MRCs. We note that the region remains attractive, particularly for 25-59-year-olds," explains Mr. O'Connor.

The Vivre en Gaspésie Strategy is also addressing housing and childcare space shortages, which hinder population growth, adds Mr. O'Connor.

Migrations feed the population hike

Migrations, whether within Quebec or from other provinces and countries, account for the 2023-2024 population increase, notes Mr. O'Connor.

"An important factor of demographics is the balance between deaths and births. In that regard, the region is in deficit, as the number of deaths in 2023-2024 reached 1,330, while the number of births stood at 665, which is 50%.



Photo: G. Gagné

Danick O'Connor.

So, we have a balance of minus 665. The decline in this statistic has accelerated since the balance was minus 362 in 2020, due to an increase in the number of deaths. The number of births remains stable at a point between 650 and 700," he explains.

However, the picture looks much brighter in terms of population movements.

"There are three variables in demographics. So, in addition to the plus 437 inter-regional balance, namely the

movements within Quebec, we must add the interprovincial-international balance, where the region shows a plus (714). Our record is not perfect but we remain optimistic. We have an obligation to have positive net migration balances due to our age pyramid," analyzes Danick O'Connor.

The Gaspé Peninsula and Magdalen Islands' demographics results for 2023-2024 are slightly better than those of the previous two years, but they are below the population hike of 2020-2021, he adds.

"2020-2021 was marked by the pandemic. Some people moved to the Gaspé Peninsula. That's out of the ordinary. The net population increase reached more than 1,000 people. After that year, what we were interested in was what was going to happen after the pandemic. A balance of 486 is good in that context. Our net rate of increase is the best among remote regions. If there was no incredible external factor showing up, upcoming years could look like this," concludes Mr. O'Connor.

Strike by CSN-affiliated daycare educators

NELSON SERGERIE
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

GASPÉ - On January 23, at least 150 of the 300 daycare educators in the Gaspé Peninsula and Magdalen Islands, affiliated with the CSN union, demonstrated in the streets of Gaspé, to activate the renewal of the collective labour agreement, which expired on March 31, 2023.

As a result, parents who have children attending one of the 12 early childhood centres (CPE) in the region had to find alternative childcare for the day.

This is the first day of strike action out of five adopted last fall. "It's satisfying to see so many educators mobilized. This proves to us that almost all early childhood educators need better working conditions, better support for children in difficulty, and better pedagogical support. They need better working conditions in general," states the president of the Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine Central Council of the CSN, Serge



CPE educators gathered at the Gaspé arena before heading to the offices of the Gaspé MNA.

Photo: N. Sergerie

Saint-Pierre.

CPEs are struggling to recruit workers, as is the case for the new 71-place facility in Chandler, which is only operating at 25% of its capacity due to the inability to recruit enough staff.

"We see that in large centres, educators are leaving to go work at places like Walmart or Costco, where they are paid more and the workload is much less," explains Mr. Saint-Pierre.

"If we want economic de-

velopment, if we want regional development, one of the problems we see is the lack of places in early childhood. The government can resolve this issue and make it a priority. That's what it said it would do a few years ago. We're still waiting for the results," says Mr. Saint-Pierre.

The educators also visited the office of Gaspé Member of the National Assembly Stéphane Sainte-Croix to present their demands.

"We need early childhood

centres. The network isn't sick, but we're having trouble retaining workers and attracting them to fill vacant positions. It's having an impact on the region's economy to accommodate the children of parents looking for work. Workers aren't returning to the workforce because there aren't any daycare spaces," explained Mr. Saint-Pierre.

At the negotiating table, some sector-specific issues have been resolved, but no salary offers have been made

by the employer.

Meanwhile, other CPE workers' unions have settled with the Quebec government. "It's a matter for the negotiating committee. Why did Quebec settle with the small CPE unions and not make a final offer with the CSN? We have the impression that they want to drag out the negotiations," believes Gaétan Leblanc, regional vice-president of the CSN's Fédération de la santé et des services sociaux.

The union still has four more strike days that can be used as needed.

The workers are demanding a lighter workload, better pay to ensure attraction and retention, regional disparity bonuses for employees in certain remote regions and measures to improve the quality of services to children. These include clear and respected ratios between the number of educators and children, as well as better support for children with special needs.

In Quebec, 13,000 educators affiliated with the CSN were on strike on January 23.

YORK:

Wakeham-York Winter Carnival

February 7: 6 p.m. Disco skating; 7 p.m. bonfire, fireworks, cash bar and music with Coco and Dodo.

February 8: Pal airlines family day. 10 a.m. family snowshoeing; 1 p.m. masquerade, tea boiling contest, ice bowling and nail driving; 3:30 p.m. hockey bottine; and 7 p.m. Texas holdem.

February 9: 1 p.m. bingo; 5:30 p.m. super bowl party with pizza, hot dogs, wings and nachos.

February 11: 7 p.m. tuck tournament, bring a partner.

February 12: Polyvalent activity day.

February 13: 7 p.m. line dancing with JR country dancer.

February 14: Valentine Hoedown dance, 6 p.m. for ages 6-12; and 8 p.m. for ages 13-17.

February 15: Snowmobile poker run, 7 to 10 a.m. breakfast; 10 a.m. leaving York rink; 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. return to hall; 7 p.m. dance with music by John Gedeon.

HOPE: Hope Baptist Church

Sundays: Sunday School starting at 10 a.m. Worship service beginning at 11 a.m.

NEW CARLISLE: New Carlisle Legion

Every Monday: From January 20 to February 17, a five-week cribbage tournament will be held starting at 7 p.m. \$10 one time registration and \$3 per player per night, bring a partner.

Wednesdays: Shuffle board beginning at 4 p.m. Line Dancing beginning at 7:30 p.m. for \$7.

Thursdays: Darts beginning at 7 p.m. for \$10.

Saturdays: Pool beginning at 8 p.m. \$1 per game.

February 4: General meeting at 6 p.m. at 1 Mount Sorrel, New Carlisle.

NEW CARLISLE: Bible Chapel Meetings

Sundays: Breaking of Bread for believers - 9:30 a.m., Gospel meeting and Sunday School - 2 p.m.

Thursdays: Prayer Meeting and Bible Study - 7 p.m. Everyone welcome! Formore information: 418-752-3372 or 418-752-6011.

CASCAPEDIA-ST-JULES: 50+ Club

Tuesdays: Weekly bingo every Tuesday at 6:30 p.m. \$10 for three cards. Extra cards are \$1 each

February 15: The Cascapedia 50+ club presents Nash Stanley beginning at 8 p.m., \$20 per ticket. Tickets sales are limited so

get yours now by contacting Kim Bater at 418-999-0879 or Tammy Campbell at 418-391-2060.

CASCAPEDIA-ST-JULES: Book Room

Please be advised that the book room is open. Anyone who needs assistance can contact Kathleen at 418-392-4896.

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Shigawake

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Sunday, February 2
St. Andrew - York

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Sunday, February 9
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A family's journey with Alzheimer's

HOLLY SMITH
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

NEW CARLISLE - Alzheimer's disease is more than just statistics, it's an emotional journey that profoundly impacts many families. According to Statistics Canada, approximately 750,000 Canadians are living with the disease, with 414 new cases diagnosed daily. Behind every number is a story of love, heartache, and strength. Amy Day's is one such story. The young woman is bravely sharing her grandmother's journey with Alzheimer's on social media (Tiktok), vividly painting a picture of the pain and beauty that come with an Alzheimer's diagnosis.

"When I was younger, I would sleep with my Nanny pretty much every night. My first memory of her would have to be her playing with my hair as I went to sleep while singing, You Are My Sunshine. We were each other's sunshine and still are. We shared so many wonderful memories, from playing sports outside in the summer to fishing at Lac Duval and walking the beach to look for cool rocks. The list goes on. There's nothing my Grandmother didn't do for me," she adds.

However, in 2020, Amy noticed subtle changes in her grandmother. "I started noticing that she would repeat herself a lot. I was living in the city at the time, but would talk to her on the phone 99 times a day. She started to tell me the same stories over and over,

and I'd have to say, 'Nanny, you just told me that, remember?' I think that's when she realized it too. On my first vacation home after that, we went down to the beach for a walk. She told me the same story within a 20-minute span. I said, 'Nanny, I really think something is wrong.' She looked at me with nothing but heartbreak in her eyes and said, 'I know,' and we both cried."

The diagnosis brought waves of emotion. "It was hard. There was also a lot of guilt," says Amy, who wondered if they should have brought her Nanny to the doctor sooner. During that period the family went through many emotions. "I was always so afraid to lose my grandmother; I just never thought I'd have to lose her in this way," says Amy.

Upon her grandmother's diagnosis, the family immediately educated themselves on the disease. Amy's family, including her grandfather and Aunt Selena, have been essential in caregiving. "My grandfather does everything now, along with Aunt Selena and myself. We have to make sacrifices, but it's our turn to take care of her, just as she did for us our whole lives. My grandmother's family doctor has been amazing in helping us through this process. She checks in on Nanny regularly and gives us the tools necessary to take care of her. At this point, we are her resources, and we're doing the best we can," states Amy.

For families like Amy's on



Amy and her grandmother are perfect examples of how, even as memories fade, some bonds remain unbreakable.

Photo: Courtesy of Amy Day

the coast, the Société Alzheimer Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine (SAGIM) offers a lifeline. This organization provides tailored services to help those living with Alzheimer's and their caregivers. Programs include personalized counselling, support groups, and workshops designed to manage the emotional and physical toll of caregiving.

Other vital resources include the Centre d'action bénévole (CAB), which provides services such as transportation to medical appointments, friendly visits, and meal deliveries. The Gaspé Peninsula Integrated Health and Social Services Centre (CISSS) also plays a

significant role with its memory clinics. The Clinic provides specialized assessment and treatment for individuals 65+ and younger adults with cognitive disorders, focusing on maintaining autonomy and optimal functioning at home for as long as possible. To access memory clinic services, a doctor's referral must be sent to the clinic's liaison nurse. If you don't have a family doctor, you can request assistance through the Chandler CLSC home care window. The clinical nurse will review your request and inform you of your eligibility.

Multi-Services Corporation d'Aide is another essential resource in the region, committed to supporting the elderly and those losing their auton-

omy by helping them maintain their independence within their natural living environment.

Despite the resources available, the personal impact of the disease is undeniable. Amy reflects on the changes in her relationship with her grandmother: "My grandmother raised me; she's like my mother. She was my shoulder to cry on, the person I'd call when I needed someone. She was my rock. Not having that anymore has been so hard. She remembers my name sometimes, especially when I remind her, 'Remember the little girl you raised, Nanny?' and she'll say, 'Yes, Amy, she's a good girl.'"

Amy also cherishes the joyful moments that remain. "She has always had a great sense of humour, even now while fighting Alzheimer's. She's always cracking little jokes, singing, and dancing. I see her pretty much every day. Sometimes, she'll ask me to lay in bed with her, and I do. I'll sing to her, and she'll fall right asleep. The roles have reversed, but the love is still there."

Amy offers a final piece of heartfelt advice to others in similar situations: "Please be patient and try your best to stay strong for them! When your loved one with Alzheimer's repeats themselves, go with it. Listen to them. Even if it's the same story over and over. Remember that love, it never dies. The feeling will always remain. When my Nanny sees me, even though she may not remember me, I know she remembers the love. I know she can feel it. Be with them until the very end."

Did you know?

A more active, engaged brain could help delay the onset of Alzheimer's disease in aging individuals by a significant amount of time. A study published in the journal *Neurology* in 2021 found that high levels of cognitive activity can delay the onset of Alzheimer's disease in individuals 80 or older by five years. Reading was among the cognitive activities researchers associated with that delay. In addition, a separate study found that more passive cognitive activities could be linked to an increase in dementia risk. That study, published in the journal *PNAS* in 2022, linked activities such as watching television with an increased risk for dementia.

10 Possible Signs of Dementia

Ten common signs of dementia are described below. If you are concerned about any of these changes in yourself or someone else, contact a health-care provider or your local Alzheimer Society.

<p>Loss of initiative Losing interest in spending time with friends and family and in taking part in activities. Needing prompts to become involved.</p>	<p>Misplacing things Putting things in strange places, like a remote in the refrigerator.</p>	<p>Changes in mood, behaviour and personality Experiencing severe mood changes or behaving out of character, such as being suspicious or withdrawing.</p>
<p>Difficulty doing familiar tasks Forgetting how to do something you've been doing your whole life, such as preparing a meal or getting dressed.</p>	<p>Problems with abstract thinking Having difficulty managing finances or not knowing what numbers are and how they are used.</p>	<p>Impaired judgment Not recognizing a medical problem that needs attention or wearing light clothing on a cold day.</p>
<p>Changes in language and communication Forgetting words, substituting words or using the wrong words that don't fit the conversation.</p>	<p>Memory changes that affect day-to-day abilities Forgetting who a family member is or not remembering new information.</p>	<p>Changes in sight or motion Not seeing objects when walking or difficulty placing items on a table.</p>

For more information, contact your local Alzheimer Society. Visit alzheimer.ca/find. Created 2015. Last reviewed 2024. Next review due 2028. © Alzheimer Society of Canada, 2024. All rights reserved.

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Alzheimer's disease and the various dementias

Dementia is an umbrella term that alludes to various conditions arising from damage to brain cells that affect the cells' ability to communicate. This damage can affect a person's ability to think clearly and his or her behavior and emotions, says the Alzheimer's Association. There are several types of dementia, and Alzheimer's disease is one of them.

It is important to recognize that dementia is not a normal part of aging. Many conditions contribute to dementia. Alzheimer's disease (AD) is the most common form of dementia, accounting for between 60 and 80 percent of all diagnoses, says the Alzheimer's Society. The symptoms of dementia include:

- memory loss that can include both short-term and long-term memory issues
- difficulties with thinking, problem-solving or language that are severe enough to impact daily activities
- changes in mood or behavior

Symptoms of AD can overlap with other types of dementia. However, unlike other dementias that may affect only one part of the brain, AD generally affects most of the brain. The most common early symptom of AD is difficulty remembering new information. That's because AD typically affects the part of the brain associ-

ated with learning first, says the Alzheimer's Association. As the disease progresses, which it's bound to do because it is degenerative, symptoms become more severe. Disorientation, confusion and behavioral changes may become more pronounced. Over time, even speaking, walking and swallowing can become difficult due to changes to the brain.

The National Institute on Aging says abnormal buildup of proteins known as amyloid plaque and tau tangles are implicated in dementia occurrence. People with AD also may experience a loss of connections between neurons in the brain. Neurons are responsible for transmitting messages between different parts of the brain, and from the brain to muscles and organs in the body.

AD is not the only type of dementia. Here's a look at some lesser known forms of the disease.

- **Vascular dementia:** After AD, vascular dementia is the next most common form of the condition. Vascular dementia occurs when there is trouble with the blood supply to the brain, which often occurs after a stroke.
- **Dementia with Lewy Bodies:** This dementia is linked to the presence of Lewy bodies, which are clumps of proteins in the brain. Symptoms of this dementia mimic both

Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease, which can make it hard to diagnose.

• **Frontotemporal dementia:** This dementia affects the frontotemporal lobes, impacting language, thinking and behavior.

• **Mixed dementia:** This occurs when two or more dementias are happening at the same time. AD and vascular dementia usually are responsible for mixed dementia.

A visit to the doctor is

warranted whenever personality, memory and language issues present. It can take time to diagnose dementias,

so any symptoms that adversely affect the brain should be reported to a physician immediately.

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Annual Christmas concert enjoyed by many

Elaine Sexton

CASCAPEDIA-ST-JULES: - The annual Christmas concert was held at the St-Jules Parish Church. The community is grateful to the organizers, including Miranda Willett, the children, musicians and other talented performers, along with the support of parents and attendees. The concert was a great success.



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