

Thirty people attended the Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the North Renfrew United Landowners (NRUL) on Tuesday, February 28, 2017 in the Deep River Legion.

Frank Burke, president of the NRUL, welcomed everyone and reviewed the activities of the NRUL in the past year regarding the Renfrew County Official Plan Review.

Janis Gulens, NRUL Treasurer, gave a detailed financial report of the association's income and expenses. 2016 started with a deficit but finished the year with a surplus, largely due to generous donations from members. Betty Condie and Larry Mahoney had previously reviewed and approved the financial documents.

Claire Watts presided over the election of the executive. All positions were acclaimed. Frank Burke continues as President, Janis Gulens continues as Vice President and Treasurer, and Bess Burke is Secretary.

Burke then turned the floor over to Mark Breckon, NRUL member, to update the group on the activities of the Blue Ribbon Panel on Property Rights (BRPPR). Breckon informed the audience that eighteen months ago Patrick Brown, newly elected as the leader of the Ontario Progressive Conservative (PC) Party, had concerns about property rights. He asked Jack MacLaren, MPP Carleton-Mississippi Mills, to form a Blue Ribbon Panel on Property Rights.

MacLaren, Chair of the BRPPR, assembled a group of key people mainly from the Ontario Landowners Association (OLA): Tom Black, President, (OLA); Marlene Black Editor, Landowner Magazine; Mark Breckon, President and CEO, Fraser View Group; Frank Burke, President, NRUL; Donna Burns, President, Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke Landowners Association; Shirley Dolan, President, Carleton Landowners Association; Tim Mount, Director, Carleton Landowners Association; and Mike Westley, Director, Carleton Landowners Association; and members of the Secretariat, Shirley Dolan, David Pierce, and Michael Bonner; to discuss the issues surrounding property rights. The panel's first task was to select an internationally recognized strategic planning model and start the strategic planning process. A purpose statement was developed:

“This Blue Ribbon Panel shall develop and implement a strategic plan to champion the value of property rights for the benefit of all people of Ontario so that property rights are honoured and respected by people and all levels of government.

We are passionate about responsible stewardship of property and its association with the ability of people to prosper and enjoy their personal rights and freedoms.”

The group wrote a preliminary report outlining the erosion of property rights and their path going forward. MacLaren, Breckon, and Dolan presented this report to Brown, on January 31, 2017. They got full support from Brown to make recommendations and have town hall meetings throughout the province to gather

input from the residents on the impact that Ontario Government legislation and regulations is having on property owners. Two of Brown's staff and two of MacLaren's staff have been made available for support as required.

The BRPPR established three key strategies of Education, Consultation, and Marketing to accomplish their goals. These strategies will be utilized at province wide town hall meetings on property rights. A website www.yourpropertyrights.ca has been created and explains what property rights are, collects stories of how people's property rights have been infringed upon, and includes a Consultation Form for online submissions of comments. An e-mail address info@yourpropertyrights.ca has been included to answer requests for more information or to arrange a town hall meeting.

Input will be collected until May 15, 2017 when recommendations for a proposed policy on Property Rights will be formulated to be presented to the PC Policy convention on November 25, 2017 in Toronto. Policies vetted and approved at the convention will form PC planks in the upcoming provincial election scheduled for 2018.

The BRPPR have proposed three key solutions to the erosion of Property Rights.

1. The creation of a Ministry of Property Rights. They have learned from Alberta's experience that their Property Rights Advocate Office was not effective because it did not have the resources or authority to make changes.
2. All existing legislation and policies must be examined for their effect on property rights.
3. Property Rights must be entrenched in all proposed legislation.

The BRPPR believe that these three solutions will solve the issues with property rights in the long term. Input from the public will bring new ideas to the table to be considered as well.

In the shorter term the panel needs to get some successes. All panel members agree that everyone wants: clean water to drink, swim and fish in; protection of animals from abuse; management of watersheds and so on. The problem comes when Property Rights are not respected in accomplishing these goals. Groups, especially Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's), for example Conservation Authorities, Heritage designations and the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (OSPCA), who are not elected or accountable, grab more power. Often it is done bit by bit so that no one even recognizes that it is happening. Trespassing is one example of NGO and GO staff ignoring property owners' rights when they are doing their job. Even the police cannot come on a property without a warrant or the owner's permission.

The NRUL and OLA are not affiliated with the Ontario PC Party but saw the BRPPR as an opportunity of a lifetime to make a real difference to ensure that Property Rights are protected. Article 2 in the Constitution of the PC Party states:

"We believe that economic freedom, entrepreneurial spirit and the right to property are essential to economic prosperity and political freedom".

In developing the proposed policies on Property Rights for the PC Party Policy convention, the BRPPR will emphasize the importance of respect for property rights by people, the judiciary, and all levels of government. They believe that the PC Party will put in place the checks and balances in legislative design that will hold all new legislation written by the Province, Counties and the Municipalities to account with respect to impact on property rights.

Common Law is recognized as the law of Private Property. The BRPPR believes that the PC party, when in power, will endorse an undertaking to investigate every law that has been created and still stands on the books as to whether or not it respects the rights of property owners.

With this tone change from government, the BRPPR believes that we will see that respect reflected in society as a whole.

More information on the BRPPR and Property Rights in Ontario can be obtained from www.yourpropertyrights.ca. The Panel welcomes any and all input from any concerned citizen at info@yourpropertyrights.ca