



# **Lake Bernard Association Towards an Enhanced Association Web Site**

**By**

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# **Lake Bernard Association**

## **Towards an Enhanced Association Web Site**

### **1. Background**

The purpose of this document is to propose a strategy for enhancing the Association web site in order to exploit its use as a tool for promoting a greater sense of community among cottage and property owners around the lake, and for increasing membership in the Association.

### **2. Issues**

Members of the Association do not know what their membership dues pay for. In the minds of many the Association is an abstract entity that has no real presence in their lives. They appreciate that there needs to be an Association to represent the lake community, especially in matters of a political nature or that involve the municipalities, and they see its value in initiatives ranging from the environment to the regatta. However, such representation is seen as something distant and initiatives such as the regatta are viewed as individual events and, for some, not even connected to the Association at all. The Association is seen as comprising a number of parts and never as a 'whole'.

Annual membership in the Association hovers around 250 members. There are approximately 420 property owners on the lake. Marketing the association to promote membership has been limited and based on traditional methods that have had only limited success (though the newly created membership sector contacts network has made a difference). Marketing the Association has been a challenge.

Communication among property owners and cottagers has been via the listserv. Formal communication out to members has been via the Gmail account. The listserv is open to anyone while the Gmail account is only for paid up members and only for formal Association communications (all of which must be translated). The web site offers a Forum for communication among groups of members but it is rarely used. While the listserv is a valuable resource the fact that it is open to anyone means that there is no incentive for property owners and cottagers to join the Association.

The membership renewal process is labour intensive and although the introduction of PayPal has been a major enhancement the process is still slow, burdensome, and prone to errors.

The Association web site could be used as the basis for addressing many of these issues. It contains a rich set of information resources pertaining to the lake and its environment as well as the activities of the lake community. In many respects it provides a single window to the Association and serves as a central focal point to which the membership can turn for authoritative and reliable information. To date, however, member access to the web site has been low. This is largely because members do not see the web site as an integral part of their regular activities at the cottage. If they want information they must

take the time and make the effort to access the site, search for the appropriate area, and retrieve the information. They must go to the web site - the web site does not come to them.

The current state of the web site simply reflects the natural evolution that occurs in the maturity of most web sites. At this stage, however, and given the issues raised above, it is timely to reflect on how the web site can migrate to the next level of maturity - a level where increased attention is paid to services and information is provided to members in a more active manner. The web site becomes an integral part of the daily lives of Association members and a catalyst for enhancing a sense of community and promoting Association membership.

The remainder of this document presents a proposal for enhancing the web site to address the identified issues and to take advantage of the opportunities that are available through the web-enabling of services and information sources.

### **3. Objectives**

The objectives of an enhanced web site are:

- To encourage greater member engagement in and connection with the Association and the Lake Bernard community
- To foster a stronger sense of community among cottage and property owners around Lake Bernard.
- To promote membership in the Association and enhance communication among property owners and cottagers.

### **4. Proposed Strategy**

The proposed strategy is to enhance substantially the existing web site while maintaining the rich content and services available through the current site. Based on a technical review it was concluded that the web design and maintenance tools used for the current site were more than adequate to support the redesign of the site.

The Web Committee will undertake the re-development of the website in collaboration with the proposed Director of Marketing and Communications and the Director of Membership as well as other members of the Executive.

Based on the objectives described above, the proposed new site would contain the following sections with each section being given its own place on the home page toolbar.

#### **Home page**

The home page would have a tool bar across the top (or down the side?) that would reflect the following titles:

- About Us
- News and Announcements
- Environment
- Security
- Government Affairs
- Events
- Membership
- Shop
- Contact Us

Later versions of the site would have feeds that would automatically update information on topics such as the weather, news articles from sources that would be relevant to the lake (e.g. The Lowdown), etc. There would also be links to either French or English versions of the site.

### **About Us**

This section would contain text from the existing site such as

- Information about the Association
- Committees
- Recent minutes
- The Executive (including photos)
- Trophies
- Map of the lake
- General By-Laws
- Document archive

A new sub-section called 'History' would be established. It would contain information on the history of the lake including photos, documents, oral histories, etc. It would be maintained by a member who would be dedicated to accumulating the information, organizing it and, with the Director of the Web Site, posting it to the web site. A link to flickr or some other photo hosting service could also be provided to enable members to establish links from the Association web site to important photo collections documenting the lake.

### **News and Announcements**

This section would contain news items that will be of interest to the membership. It would contain the existing information already on the site plus additional newsworthy information that may appear from time to time and that will be of interest to the membership. Email campaigns would be sent to all contacts (i.e. members and non-members) on the lake on a regular basis directing them to the news items as they appear on the site (e.g. buoys have been placed; number of loons counted; etc.). This section

might also be used to hold information on garbage collection and private roads as provided in the current version of the web site. If the person is not a member, however, they will be sent back to the membership page for access to this page

In addition this section would feature a newsletter (issued generally once a month in the summer - total being 4 for the year) with content being created/solicited by the Director of Marketing and Communications. The Newsletter could contain news items, links to important articles and information sources, and a variety of other items that would be attractive to Association members. Photos would be used throughout to maximize visibility and appeal. An email would be sent to members directing them to the website which would have the details of the news item.

Later versions of the site could support feeds to key media sources such as The Low Down based on (perhaps) blanket discounted subscriptions offered to members

## **Environment**

This section would contain text from the existing site such as:

- Water quality statistics
- The water sampling program
- Blue Green Algae information
- Eco-friendly products information
- Shoreline concerns, plantings, regulations, etc.
- Noise pollution information

Alerts would be sent on a regular basis on issues such as water quality testing with links to statistics stored on the site. While text would be the dominant format used in this section consideration would be given to including significant webinar links, important videos and other multi-media sources that would communicate effectively key environmental topics and issues. Links to outside sources would also be provided.

Later versions of the web site might be used to host online discussions concerning important environmental topics.

## **Security**

This section would contain information from the current Info Lac Bernard section of the current web site. It would cover:

- General security information such as police liaison, neighbourhood watch, etc.
- Emergency contacts
- Boating safety
- Swimming safety
- Fire safety
- Bears

In addition to the information from Info Lac Bernard, other information of particular interest to members would be included such as 'lake access'. Alerts would be sent on security matters on an as required basis as coordinated by the executive member responsible for security.

### **Government Affairs**

This section would contain text from the existing web site plus it would support the dissemination of alerts concerning important government meetings, issues, etc. that would be of interest to the membership.

### **Events**

This section would contain text from the existing web site plus information on events such as boating courses, swimming lessons, shoreline plantings workshops, etc. that might come up through the year. Alerts would be sent to the membership to advise them of new events. Information on some events would be open to anyone while information on other events would be restricted to members only.

Consideration should be given to having a shared Google calendar sent to executive committee members once a month for shared access and recording activities for themselves and others. It could also be used to reserve the clubhouse.

### **Membership**

This section would contain electronic versions of the membership documents including the invoice. A link would be provided to enable members to pay by PayPal. Alerts would be sent to announce the membership campaign and to send reminders to pay membership dues. The membership directory would be held here but would be available to members only. In a future phase it would be designed such that it could be updated by members themselves as their tombstone information changes. Ultimately the site would be designed such that members could manage their own accounts and even pay their memberships on-line. (John, I suggest that we talk to Paul Hayes to see if he may be able to help put the membership database online)

### **Shop**

This section would contain photos of logo items for sale and an explanation of how they can be purchased and where they can be obtained. The initial version of the site might simply contain an invoice form that would be mailed to the Logo Items 'Store'. Occasional messages would be sent to members directing them to the virtual 'store'. Later versions of the site might include a PayPal feature where the PayPal message from a member would identify the logo item and shipping information.

The list of service providers described in the current version of the web site would be included in this section.

Later versions of the site might also include virtual ‘stores’ enabling artists around the lake to market their products.

## **Contact Us**

This section would identify who can be contacted concerning further information on the range of topics covered by the Association. It would essentially be the list of contacts described in the current version of the web site.

## **5. Resource Requirements**

The development of the enhanced site would be based on the web design and development technology used for the current site. The skills required for this project are available within the web committee and executive on a volunteer basis.

The content of the site would be migrated by the Communications/Marketing Director in cooperation with the Director of the Web Site. Any additional content (e.g. photos of logo items) would be undertaken by the Director of Communications and Marketing working with Executive members. Given that some of the site will need to be translated consideration will need to be given to factoring in this cost (ie. retain in-house or, if a sizeable amount, contract out the work or phase it in over time). The new translated logo would be used throughout.

The email campaigns will be carried out on an annual basis in January, March, June, July, August, September, and December. At \$18.00 per campaign the annual cost will be \$126.00.

## **6. Recommendations**

It is recommended that the Association Executive:

- Approve the proposal to enhance the new site
- Approve the proposed design of the web site
- Approve the annual email campaign costs of \$126.00 (included in 2011-2012 budget)

Should the executive approve these recommendations then the following steps will be followed:

A project team will be formed and a project plan will be created to guide the work of redeveloping the website.

The Director of Communications and Marketing would undertake responsibilities (e.g. newsletter, etc.) for maintaining and exploiting the content of the web site and its supporting services to secure greater engagement with the lake community. She would do this through consultation with and in cooperation with other Executive members.

The Director of Communications and Marketing would provide semi-annual reports on the degree to which the web site is meeting the objectives identified in this proposal.

Should the Executive approve the recommendations then it is proposed that an announcement be made at the Fall Association meeting after which work would commence on the design, development, and testing of the new site with a view to launching the new site in time for the 2012 Membership Campaign, in late winter / early spring.