

Letter: Proposed Bala plant is nonsense, not the community's response | MuskokaRegion.com

Letter to the editor

Opinion 01:29 PM Gravenhurst Banner

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I would like to correct several statements in the Oct. 2, 2017, letter to the editor "Continued protesting of Bala plant is just nonsense."

First, the proposed Bala hydroelectric generating station is not "fully approved." There are still at least two approvals the proponent needs to construct their proposed project.

Also, I agree there were many interruptions at the proponent's construction meeting at the Bala Community Centre on Sept. 21. In my case, I had to interrupt due to the completely incorrect statements the proponent was making. As I committed at the meeting, I did followup with the correct information, backed-up with the proponent's own documents, which you can read for yourself at <http://savethebalafalls.com/?p=8413>.

It should alarm anyone that it would be unprecedented to build a hydroelectric generating station in the middle of a very popular in-water recreational area; the proponent has never done it, and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry has never done it. Yet the proponent has not shown how, or even if, they could operate their proposed generating station safely.

As our MPP Norm Miller asked twice during the week of Sept. 25, 2017, of the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry, during the legislature's question period — where is the public safety plan? Everybody should be quite worried that both the proponent and the MNRF refuse to disclose their public safety plan to the public.

The Burgess Creek/Mill Stream hydroelectric generating station currently operating in Bala is quite tiny and harmless, generating about 0.15 MW of power. That could be quite reasonable if that is what the Bala proponent wanted to build. But the Bala proponent wants to build something with 30 times that output. Stations that size are confirmed deadly.

Ontario Power Generation owns and operates two 8 MW hydroelectric generating stations downstream of Bala and safely far away from any in-water recreation. OPG is paid 3 to 4 ¢/kWh for the power these generating stations produce. Yet we taxpayers of Ontario would be paying the Bala proponent the highly-subsidized rate of up to 17 ¢/kWh for power produced, even when the power isn't needed, and even when it could be obtained for less elsewhere such as from OPG's downstream generating stations.

The writer asks:

— Whether the proposed project could reduce flooding. The fact is there would more likely be flooding of Lake Muskoka, as keeping the water higher would result in disproportionately greater profits to the proponent.

— If the proposed generating station would provide steady employment. The answer is no, there would be no local operator, such stations run automatically and unattended.

— If the proposed project would provide substantial property taxes. The answer is no, generating stations are exempt from paying property tax.

The community is rightly angered that this proposed Bala project has not been shown to be safe and would receive a guaranteed subsidy of over \$100,000,000 (yes, over 100 million dollars!) over their 40-year contract. This would be money from the taxpayers of Ontario to a private developer for power that isn't needed. Tourists won't come to see the dry rocks where the falls used to be and they won't come to see an ugly concrete building blocking the view down the Moon River.

It is this proposed project that is nonsense, not the community's response.

Mitchell Shnier, Toronto