



THE LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR'S COMMUNITY SPIRIT AWARD NOMINATION

Portland Estates & Hills

Groups within the community who have joined together to put forward this nomination:

1. Portland Estates and Hills Residents' Association (PEHRA)
2. PEHRA Environment Committee
3. PEHRA Trails and Parks Committee
4. PEHRA Birches Park Committee
5. Portland Estates Elementary School, Parent Teacher Organization
6. Cow Bay Lake Watershed Network
7. Scouts Canada, First Portland Estates Cubs and Beavers

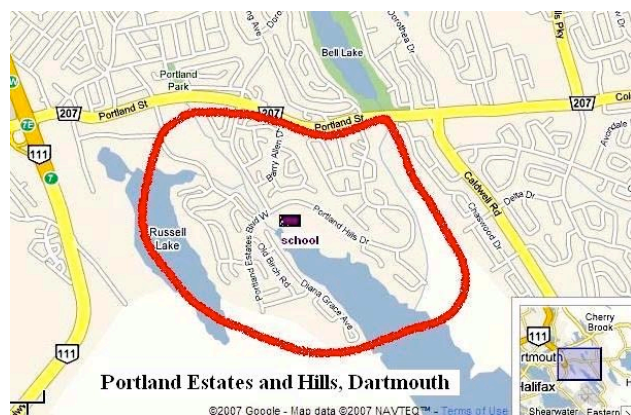
The Portland Estates and Hills Community

Portland Estates and Portland Hills is a vibrant, active and diverse community situated in the heart of the Portland Valley in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia (see map below). Starting in the early 1980's, the community was built in stages by several developers, and now has a population approaching 6,000 people. Situated between two lakes --Morris Lake and Russell Lake -- the community enjoys the best of country and city, but also recognizes how fragile the balance between environment and growth can be.

The community became connected early in its development by rallying around issues that would preserve its quiet, country-like atmosphere. The Portland Estates Residents' Association (PERA) was formed, which has now expanded to include Portland Hills under the name The Portland Estates and Hills Residents' Association (PEHRA). This association continues to be active in various facets of development in and around the community, working closely with municipal staff and developers.

As you will see in the following stories, the community has faced many challenges over the last two decades. The residents have played an important role in ensuring the quality of living has not only remained intact, but actually improved. We hope you will gain an appreciation for the dedication our residents have to our community, and for the spirit they possess.

We are proud of the community and its accomplishments. We hope that our successes will inspire other communities to become active in meeting the challenges that face communities throughout Nova Scotia.



Growth and Diversity in Our Community

The Portland Estates and Hills community is celebrating its 25th birthday. The first houses were constructed in 1984. The population grew to 2,500 by 1996 and 5,000 by 2006, and development is still proceeding in the final phases of Portland Hills. Our census tract recorded a 31% population increase between 2001 and 2006, compared with 4% for metropolitan Halifax.

Our community is more diverse, socially and demographically, than the typical metropolitan suburb, for a special reason. It was the first community in Dartmouth to be developed through the comprehensive development district (CDD) process, and is one of the largest products of CDD planning in Nova Scotia. In this process, municipal planners require private developers to provide a mix of housing types and densities, oriented to a variety of market segments. For example, the June 2000 development agreement for Portland Hills specified a gross density of six units per acre, with approximately 40% single-family, 35% apartments (both rental and condominium), and the remainder semi-detached and townhouse. Overall, our community's 2,400 occupied dwellings are 66% single-family, 14% semi-detached or row-housing, and 20% apartments (2006 census).

Portland Estates and Portland Hills developed in phases over a period of twenty-five years, so we see diversity in the age and style of housing, and in the demographic make-up of the various phases. The initial phases were developed in the 1980s, and now have many 'empty-nesters' and seniors. In contrast, recent phases of Portland Hills have ongoing development, and many younger adults and young children. The community as a whole has slightly more youth (16.7%) than the average for metropolitan Halifax (16.1%), or Nova Scotia (16.6%), but also a significantly higher senior population (23.5%, versus 12.5% and 15.2%). The seniors population is boosted by the presence of one large retirement home (the Berkeley) and several apartment buildings oriented to retirees. Many long-time residents have chosen to retire in the community, often 'downsizing' to smaller townhouses or apartments.

More than most suburban communities, Portland Estates has attracted residents from far and wide, including immigrants from many countries. Immigrants comprise 8.7% of our population, compared with 7.4% in metropolitan Halifax as a whole, and 5.0% in the province. 8.7% also have mother tongues other than English or French (versus 5.4% in metro and 3.9% in Nova Scotia.). In its library, the Portland Estates elementary school proudly displays flags from all the countries

Flag display in the school library



represented by its students. The school is also recognizing our community's diverse culture by hosting a 'Cultural Workshop Day' in March 2009. This workshop will be an opportunity for everyone to learn about, celebrate, and highlight the cultures within our school and community.

The Portland Estates and Hills Residents' Association (PEHRA)

PEHRA was formed in 1990 as the Portland Estates Residents' Association (PERA) and changed its name in Fall 2007 to reflect the growth of the community and its widened mandate. The association acts as an environmental watchdog, organizes community events (e.g. clean-ups, skating parties, summer picnics, dances), and has built an extensive trail system. We keep residents informed through our website (<http://www.pehra.ca/>) and through quarterly newsletters delivered to all community households.

The residents' association began life following a successful 1990 Earth Day clean-up of city-owned green spaces. Residents were concerned by the complete lack of recreational amenities in the community. Through a strong membership drive, and supported by Dartmouth city councillor Bruce Hetherington, three years of city funding

were approved for park development, and PERA members worked with Dartmouth city staff and consultants to design and construct the first phase of Birches Park. More recently, PEHRA has been working on a plan for renewal and completion of the park.

Environmental issues have always been central to PEHRA's mandate. Initially, its directors worked with city staff and the Dartmouth Lakes Advisory Board (DLAB) to mitigate run-off problems associated with development on Eisenor Boulevard (The Real Atlantic Superstore, apartment buildings, etc.), and secured a community representative on DLAB in 1991. More recently, PEHRA representatives on various public participation committees were greatly involved in the formation of development agreements for Portland Hills (2000) and Russell Lake West (2005), and ensured strong environmental safeguards were put in place in the Morris-Russell Lakes Secondary Planning Strategy (2005). Notable successes in this process were the requirement for 100-foot vegetation buffers along all lakeshores and brooks, and the setting-aside of at least 50% of lakeshore as public parkland.

In 1998 and 1999, PERA fought hard to prevent the building of a high-volume road through the community that was proposed in relation to the Portland Hills subdivision. With tremendous local support, the association achieved a major victory at city hall: the Halifax regional council approved 23 by-law amendments that ensured the continued safety and integrity of the community, as well as the protection of the lakes and streams.

Since 2001, PEHRA members have been planning and developing a connected system of trails on municipal parkland running through the centre of the community. The work of the Trails and Parks committee is told on a separate page, but its main outcomes are impressive: over \$200,000 of funds secured, a 2.2 km main trail, 1.5 km of side trails, a boardwalk, three lake viewing platforms, and trailhead facilities.

Recently, it became apparent that the playground equipment in our park no longer met safety standards. The municipality planned to tear down the equipment and not replace it. PEHRA then formed the Birches Park Committee (chaired by Dalyce Mallion) to work with HRM. It developed a plan to replace the playground equipment, move the swings to a more suitable area, replace the obstructive entrance gate with a bollard system for easier access and implement a park improvement plan to add more facilities. In 2008, working closely with HRM, we hope to see the addition of two cement chess tables and the construction of a Birches Park community message board at the entrance to our park.

PEHRA continues as a vigilant watchdog for the Portland Estates and Hills community. Its environment committee monitors the health of the lakes and streams, its trails committee is working on a maintenance plan for the trail system, and the Birches Park committee is aiming to complete the park's development.

Community Participation and Co-operation

When Portland Estates began life in the early 1980's it was marketed as "country living in the city". The desire to protect our natural assets has been a strong theme in bringing our community together, and forging co-operation between residents of all ages. The residents' association itself was an outgrowth of an Earth Day parkland clean-up, and we continue to get excellent support and participation from the local Scouts troop and elementary school for our Spring and Fall park clean-ups. Local businesses such as the Superstore and Tim Horton's have also supported these efforts. We routinely collect approximately 30 full bags of garbage and keep the neighbourhood looking great!

The residents' association has hosted many 'get-to-know-your-neighbour' community events: skating parties on Morris Lake, Spring picnics in Birches park for families, Halloween dances, Christmas dances, and Neighbourhood Watch parties. There is spirit everywhere in our community. In this time of busy lives, you can still drive through the neighbourhood on most summer weekends and see 'street closed' signs, while the residents hold street parties and pig roasts. There are some Saturdays that you can't drive down a street for cars attending street yard sales. There are neighbourhood 'house crawls', food drives, and dinner parties. In winter, on the frozen lake in the center of the community, you can see skating parties. As well, every day of the year throughout the trail system you can see people walking, chatting, enjoying the look-out stations, and playing on the playgrounds.

As the community has grown, it has responded vigorously and positively to several challenges. For example, in the early 1990's more than 200 families gathered in the park for the Forum to Fight vandalism. Neighbourhood Watch has been introduced as a visible and vital program. Community members and groups have also become involved with the police, the fire department, and Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) through active concern and positive communication. In Spring 2008 the PTO and PEHRA jointly began a PACE Car program to raise

community awareness of the importance of pedestrian and driver responsibilities. It is great to see so many cars on the neighbourhood streets with their 'honk if I'm driving too fast' bumper stickers...a sign of caring for the safety of our residents.

In 1998/9 our community's special character was threatened by the proposal to open a highway that would redirect traffic from Caldwell Road through Portland Estates to the Circumferential Highway. The "No Way to the Highway" campaign galvanized the whole community, and successfully persuaded HRM Council to reconsider the development objectives and planning strategy for the Dartmouth / Cole Harbour area. Our community was granted representation on the Morris-Russell Lakes Public Participation Committee in 1999. This committee guided approval of comprehensive development agreements for Portland Hills (2000) and Russell Lake West (2005), and in partnership with municipal staff prepared the Morris-Russell Lakes Secondary Planning Strategy (approved 2005). All these plans contain strong mechanisms for environmental protection, and provide large areas of parkland. Through such planning participation, we have developed useful technical expertise, and good working relationships with both municipal staff and developers.

Through association, our residents have been able to undertake many improvement projects for the community. In 2001, PERA volunteers negotiated an agreement with our councillor and HRM staff to tear down the crumbling gates at the entrance of Portland Estates, which were unsafe as well as unsightly, and replace them with the current gates. The next year the Gates & Gardens Committee was established to work with HRM to install a low maintenance garden around the gates, adding a natural and attractive entrance to the community. It is with pride that this garden is looked after by the volunteers of PEHRA every year. Volunteers also hang Christmas wreaths at the community gates, and co-operate with HRM trails staff to maintain safety on our trails and in our parklands.

The Portland Lakes Trails: a Community Success Story

Over the last six years, the Portland Estates and Hills Residents' Association (PEHRA) has planned and developed a connected system of trails on municipal parklands around and between the Portland Lakes (Morris Lake and Russell Lake). There has been much support from the community for this endeavour, and the trails are much used both for recreation and active transportation (shopping and commuting).

The process began in March of 2001, when a small group of volunteers formed the PERA Bridge Reconstruction Committee. We canvassed the municipality to replace a washed-out bridge over Ellenvale Brook, to provide a pedestrian link between phase 1 of Portland Estates and the Superstore Mall. We received support from our councillor (Bruce Hetherington) and liaised with HRM parks staff. The \$50,000 bridge, designed and tendered by HRM with PERA input, was completed in the summer of 2002.

The experience gained from the successful construction of this key bridge led us to consider a longer-term project, in which a complete system of trails would be developed. This trail system would link all public parklands in the Portland Estates area, in order to fully connect our community internally and to the surrounding communities. We inaugurated the PERA Trails and Parks Committee in November of 2001 (chaired initially by Daphne Kessel, then by Hugh Millward). This committee immediately joined the Halifax Regional Trails Association (HRTA), and through HRTA we received HRM funding for a professionally-prepared trail development plan (completed in July 2002). With funding from both HRM and Nova Scotia Sports and Recreation (approximately \$214,000 to date), as well as technical assistance from municipal planners and trails specialists, we have since made the plan a reality. Our PEHRA committee currently comprises 24 members, who have contributed much time and effort to planning, fundraising, trail clearance and maintenance, trail design, and tendering.

The 2.2 km main trail forms a central spine linking all sections of the Portland Estates and Portland Hills community. It runs from Baker Drive in the west to Waterside Terrace in the east, by way of Russell Lake, Ellenvale Brook, and Birches Park. There are 1.5 km of side trails, including a delightful section of boardwalk along Russell Lake. We have constructed three lake-viewing stations (two on Morris Lake and one on Russell Lake), and there are trailhead parking areas on Baker Drive and Portland Hills Drive. Our trail brochure is available online at <http://www.halifax.ca/recreation/documents/PortlandLakesTrail.pdf>. The brochure contains a trail map, photos, and a list of trail amenities.

Environmental Protection

In 1996 the Portland Estates Resident's Association (PERA) was asked to provide input to the proposed construction of Portland Hills alongside Morris Lake by Clayton Developments Limited. Nancy Witherspoon, a resident with professional skills as an environmental scientist, volunteered to chair an Environment Committee under the auspices of PERA, and meetings took place to discuss environmental protection measures proposed by

Clayton. The primary focus was to minimize sedimentation in the lake. There were one-on-one meetings with HRM's mayor, and engineering and planning heads, and then with Clayton Developments to discuss best-management practices for watershed protection. Partly as a result of such pressure, regular sampling of the two lakes in our community -- Russell Lake and Morris Lake -- is now performed by both the municipality and the developer. The committee routinely obtains the results of testing, analyzes them, and provides summaries to the community. Any issues arising from the sampling are dealt with by direct communication with the municipal staff and the developer, with whom strong relationships have been formed.

Expanding its scope, the Environment committee worked in partnership with Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM), the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO), and students from the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design to develop an integrated approach to managing the lakes and waterways of the Cow Bay Lake Watershed. This culminated in the presentation of a seminar, reports, maps, displays, a pamphlet and logo. In addition, the committee worked directly with staff of HRM, the province, government agencies, and the private sector (NS Power and the ESSO Refinery) to draw attention to environmental issues such as physical and chemical inputs to the lakes, fish kills, habitat destruction, osprey nesting and mortalities, and near-shore habitat destruction. The committee also facilitated a community and business workshop by DFO on fish habitat protection.

The committee, in partnership with Clean Nova Scotia, also organizes two annual Community Clean-Up Events. Every Spring and Fall approximately 50-75 members of the community meet to pick up garbage and recyclables from our park, our trails, and along the streets. As well, we have obtained donations from Tim Horton's and our local Councillor (Bill Karsten) to provide refreshments for volunteers. We have also teamed up with the local Portland Estates Elementary School to give "house points" to student volunteers, and the local Scouts groups can earn badges for their efforts. We routinely collect approximately 30 full bags of garbage and keep the neighbourhood looking great!

Under the chairmanship of Steven Godin, the committee recently persuaded Clayton Developments to change their policy on solar panels. Prior to PEHRA's involvement, residents were only allowed to have panels on the roof facing the back of their homes. We pointed out the benefits of solar energy, and Clayton agreed to allow them on both the front and back of the house. We have also kept close contact with the municipality regarding overflowing garbage receptacles and areas that were lacking adequate receptacles. They have been very receptive to our requests and appreciate our input as a community.

Recently, Nancy Witherspoon expanded the committee's work by creating the Cow Bay Lake Watershed Network, made up of businesses and volunteer groups in the watershed, as well as universities with research and analysis capabilities. These partners include MacPhee Pontiac, Esso Refinery, Saint Mary's and Queens Universities, PEHRA, Russell Lake Resident's Association, Silver Sands Protection Society, Cole Harbour Trails Association, the Abenaki Aquatic Club, and the Cole Harbour Heritage Society. This network has organized workshops, run a sediment-sampling program, and pooled environmental knowledge to map environmental resources and concerns.



Opportunity Skill Pride Respect Excellence Youth

"On wings of learning"

Portland Estates Elementary School

45 Portland Hills Drive, Dartmouth, NS, B2W 6L5

It was eight years ago that the doors of the new school opened in Portland Estates. But new walls of a school building do not make a school community. Within the first two years, however, the library was filled and less than two years later an enormous playground was built, complete with benches, trees, paving and landscaping. The rapid progress of these parent-supported improvements shows a true spirit of community. The most recent addition is the school signboard, that is shared for advertising community clean-ups, community yard sales, and other events. The spirit of filling the needs of the children makes for some wonderful community events.

The residents' association (PEHRA) and the school parent-teacher organization (PTO) recognize the important relationship between school and community when it comes to social events, fundraising needs, and community

concerns. PEHRA hosts a booth at the Spring Fair, and also holds its annual general meetings at the school. What was once the school fair is now the Community Spring Fair – over 100 volunteers come together to help with this huge annual event. Residents of all ages look forward to socializing and participating together in bingo, cake walks, games, and bouncy castles.

There are strong links between the school and the Portland Estates Scouts Canada cub and beaver packs. As examples, the school has rewarded student involvement in Scouting's community activities with "house points", and the scouts also participate at the school's annual Remembrance Day ceremonies.

In Spring 2008 the PTO and PEHRA jointly began a 'PACE Car' program to raise community awareness of the importance of pedestrian and driver responsibilities. It is great to see so many cars on the neighbourhood streets with their 'honk if I'm driving too fast' bumper stickers...a sign of caring for the safety of our residents.

Recently, members of the PTO teamed up with the PEHRA Board to press the Halifax school board and the provincial Department of Education to acquire a site for a future junior high school. A site has been reserved by Clayton Developments at the south end of Russell Lake, and several meetings have been held with our elected representatives to urge purchase of the site. The process, however, is complex, and may take some time to resolve.

Scouting in the Portland Estates & Hills Community

Because children are the future of every community, we in Portland Estates and Portland Hills recognize the importance of young people, and place a priority on their growth as citizens. Youth development in the community is achieved in many ways, and one stand-out program that is utilized is Scouts Canada. Scouts Canada (implemented and currently executed locally by parent and adult volunteers) aims to educate young people through a value system, to help build a better world where people are self-fulfilled as individuals and play a constructive role in society.

Scouting does not exist in a silo in our community, and every attempt is made to integrate both the *First Portland Estates Cub Pack* and *First Portland Estates Beaver Colony* into area activities. These Scouting groups work very closely with many other organizations to empower the children to be successful contributors to the place where they live. These organizations include, but are not limited to, the Portland Estates Elementary School (and its PTO), the residents association (PEHRA), The Berkeley Retirement Home, The Red Cross, Halifax Regional Municipality Police Service and Fire Department, and the Girl Guides. All of these "partnerships" serve to encourage local young people to lead and participate in activities that enhance our community.

The Scouts in Portland Estates and Portland Hills are very active and participate in many community events, such as:

1. Scouts Canada Apple Day – an annual event to raise funds for our local Scouts Camp. Our Scouts perpetually rank in the top 3 in Dartmouth East fundraising, which is achieved through canvassing our own neighbourhood.
2. Christmas Caroling for Seniors – an annual event at The Berkeley retirement home located in Portland Estates. Cubs and Beavers have also enhanced the lives of seniors at this complex by creating and donating Christmas ornaments for their communal tree.
3. Remembrance Day ceremonies – Each November 11th, our Scouts participate with local dignitaries by marching them into the school assembly with their flags. The Scouts also participate in Dartmouth's annual ceremony to honour those who have served.
4. In 2007, donated one month's dues to the Red Cross Tsunami Relief Fund.
5. Empire Cinemas Toy Drive – Each year, the children are encouraged to give to those less fortunate by donating new or slightly used toys each year. The toys are donated to the local cinema located in Portland Estates.
6. Community Clean-up – Scouts volunteer with their parents and leaders each September in the fall PEHRA Community Clean-up.

Due to the strong commitment of parents and leaders, our scout groups have a waiting list for enrolment each and every year. In our community scouting is an incredible resource for youth development because of seamless integration of the Scouting movement into other community activities and groups.

Seniors in our Community

As mentioned earlier, Portland Estates and Hills has a very large population of seniors. According to the 2006 census, those aged 65 and over form 23.5% of our population, compared with only 15.2% in the province as a whole. Some of these seniors reside in the Berkeley retirement home, which is conveniently located adjacent to the Superstore mall and also next to the main Portland Lakes trail. Despite infirmities, many Berkeley residents are able to enjoy short walks on the trail, or to the nearby theatres and shops.

Many more seniors in our community reside in their own homes, or in one of the large apartment buildings scattered through the neighbourhood. Some of these, such as Cedar Glen on Eisenor Boulevard, are specifically marketed to mature adults, and their residents are almost entirely over fifty. Through sensitive planning, all apartment buildings in Portland Estates and Hills lie on or near bus routes, which is convenient for older residents.

Older residents are by no means inactive, however. Probably half those who regularly walk the trails are over fifty, and many are over sixty-five. Also, some of the most active volunteers in our community are retired or semi-retired, and donate much time and energy to community organizations, events, and projects. The residents' association, in particular, relies heavily on them. A few of these individuals are highlighted here as examples.

--*George McKelvie*. George moved to Russell Lake Drive in the mid-1990s. Though a retiree, his energy and passion for the outdoors are legendary. He became well known walking the trails, cycling the roads, and swimming in the lakes. He was a founding member of the PEHRA Environment Committee, and devoted much of his time to amateur inventory of the species and habitats in our parks and undeveloped woodlands. He has been a strong and outspoken advocate for habitat protection, and for reducing development impacts on the lakes. George also has been a key member of the Trails and Parks committee, reliably attending work parties and planning meetings.

George (left) receives certificate of appreciation from PEHRA chairperson Hugh Millward



--*Bryan Elson*. Bryan moved to Portland Estates in 1992, and has been retired since 2004. As a lakeside resident, he became involved with the PEHRA Environment Committee, and in 2002 formed its Shearwater Lands Committee. As Chair of this committee, he liaised with Canada Lands Corporation, DND, and Halifax Municipality regarding the disposition of lands surplus to DND requirements at the Shearwater base, and sat as a community member on HRM's Shearwater Advisory Committee. Between 2003 and 2007, Bryan served very ably as PEHRA's President, and he continues on the PEHRA Board as interim chair of the Environment committee.

--*Moody McKay*. Moody is a retired RCMP officer, who has lived in the community since 1997. He was a founding member of the PEHRA Trails and Parks committee, and has been very active in preparing trail alignments, negotiating a donation from Home Depot, and planning for distance markers along the trails. Moody volunteers for the Shriners and the RCMP Veterans Association, and was awarded the Queen Elizabeth II Golden Jubilee Medal for his volunteer contributions. Like other seniors, he and his wife have chosen to 'downsize' within the community, rather than move out of it.

--*Annette Petrie*. Annette is a semi-retired elementary school teacher, who continues as a French-immersion substitute teacher at Shannon Park school. She is a long-time resident of Portland Estates, phase 1. She enjoys walking, and as a member of the Halifax Volksmarch group, has on several occasions led that group along the Portland Lakes trails. She is an active member of the PEHRA Trails and Parks committee, and has represented

the committee at various HRTA functions. She is a keen gardener, and recently agreed to serve as chairperson of the PEHRA Gates and Gardens committee.

Portland Estates and Hills: a New Resident's Perspective

Like so many families around the province, economic situations in our home town and employment opportunities in the metro area resulted in us looking for a place to call home in HRM. As the Portland Estates and Hills area grows, so too does my family's presence in it – we feel lucky to have found such a great place for us and our kids to call "home".

Originally from New Waterford, Cape Breton, my wife and I moved to Portland Hills four years ago, but our exposure to the area began when my sister and her family moved into Portland Estates ten years ago. Having seen how the Portland Estates development grew, and having lived in other areas of metro that were more of the "bedroom community" type, we realized that this community had the small town feel that we grew up with and decided to make it our community, too. Then, six months later, my parents decided to move from New Waterford to an apartment complex in Portland Hills. A short time later we made the unfortunate, but necessary, step of getting my mother into a nursing home -- but again the expansion of this community helped us keep our family together. My mother is now a resident of the new Parkland at the Lakes Nursing Home.

Overall, we feel very fortunate to have found a place that handles all the stages of our family-members' lives. The many trails, sidewalks and relatively quiet roads make it possible and easy for our kids to walk or bike to see "Nana and Papa", like we used to do in our small town when we were growing up. (*Daryl MacNeil, PEHRA Board Member*)