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Red tape nightmare

Pool problem turns into troublesome tale for West Hants man
SPECIAL REPORT / By CLARE MELLOR Business Reporter

Three-part series: Story One

James Wootton almost drowned in a sea of red tape when he decided to change the public pool on his West Hants farm from an outdoor one to an indoor one.

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"From the beginning to the end of this, (municipal government) did not have a clue of what we required to get from A to B," said the Ardoise resident, who wanted an indoor facility to complement his trail riding business, Boulderwood Stables.

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"You go to one person and they say, "Oh, go to that department," and that department doesn't know what you're talking about. You are spending a lot of time, and it is time you really don't have," said Mr. Wootton, who co-owns the business with his wife, Ann.

The pool building the Woottons hoped would be finished by the fall was finally completed a few weeks ago. At \$250,000, the bill came in at more than the Woottons expected.

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They financed it privately and through bank loans.

"We've got a beautiful building but not an ounce of help from government. I'm not saying that we should all get grants, but it is funny how some people can get such huge grants, and some other people can't."

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

"Feeling gratitude and not expressing it is like wrapping a present and not giving it. ."

William Arthur Ward

In 2004, municipal staff told the Woottons that they could not get a permit for their indoor swimming pool because a planning bylaw in West Hants prevented the construction of indoor recreational centres.

Later, they were told that maybe they could.

"Then we went in with our \$10 and the application permit, then they decided "No, we were certainly not allowed to build an indoor

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James Wootton stands in a new poolhouse at Boulderwood Stables in Ardoise, West Hants County. He is upset about the red tape he encountered while building. (PETER PARSONS / Staff)

TALE OF THE TAPE

- 73 per cent of business owners believe red tape adds significant stress to their lives
- 67 per cent of business owners don't think government understands how red tape affects business
- Most business owners believe government could reduce red tape by 25 per cent without sacrificing the public interest
- The smaller the business, the greater the burden of regulation
- 81 per cent of business owners say simplifying regulations would help them comply with them
- B.C. only province that measures effect of regulation

Source: Rated R, Canadian Federation of Independent

pool . . . because it could create traffic on the roads."

"There's no traffic. You could have a bed on our road. We've got unemployment and other things that you would think would be a bigger problem."

After some digging around, Mr. Wootton said, he learned he could apply to council for a bylaw amendment to allow the construction. He got a petition showing community support for the facility. But it took all of last summer to get the matter on council's agenda because of delays by the planning department, he said.

As the project was about to get underway, the Woottons learned from the Transportation Department that they would have to spend \$8,000 to upgrade their driveway to commercial standards.

Once they had footings installed, they were told that their septic system could be inadequate for the number of proposed washrooms. They were not allowed to get their footings inspected until the septic was assessed.

"Everything from what engineers we needed and what space for washrooms — none of that they would actually tell you beforehand."

Everyone from government clerks to building inspectors were just doing their jobs, said Mr. Wootton, who doesn't blame any individuals for the cumbersome process.

"The councillors right through this were very supportive, and many people were very, very supportive. It is hard to victimize anyone. It is the system rather than the people."

Business owners in Nova Scotia find little consistency exists when it comes to efficiency of government service, said Leanne Hachey, director of provincial affairs for the Canadian Federation of Independent Business.

While government rules and regulations are necessary to protect the public, many business owners complain that some don't make sense and that the process of setting up a business can be cumbersome and difficult.

"You want to create a competitive business climate," Ms. Hachey said.

"There is little consistency when it comes to helping businesses jump through all the hoops they have to jump through when opening up a business, and that speaks to the bigger picture of the need for greater accountability."

"(There needs to be) some sense of why we have some of the rules that we have, some sense of what are we hoping these rules will achieve and are we measuring those outcomes," she said

While the Woottons' septic system turned out to be fine, winter was fast approaching.

They paid for two sets of engineering plans. After paying one professional engineer, they learned the engineer must be certified to do mechanical electrical plumbing, and structural design, so they paid another professional engineer to draw up a second set of plans.

Once the project was underway, they were told that they would have to pay \$20,000 to have an air exchange system installed.

"If somebody could tell you right from the get-go what permits you needed to have, what you actually

Business

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WE WANT YOUR STORIES

Starting or expanding a business can be a challenge at the best of times, but sometimes entrepreneurs find the red tape just too much to handle. These are the stories of three entrepreneurs who recently tried to start or expand a business in Nova Scotia. If you have a story about entrepreneurs and red tape that you'd like to share, please e-mail business@herald.ca and we'll publish the best responses.

needed to do that project — you've already got yourself in with so much money at this stage that you can't go back."

All the delays meant the Woottons were forced to build in winter at a higher cost.

"A lot of vehicles got stuck. We had a whole lot of cement trucks with the cement setting in them."

David Roach says it is an entrepreneur's responsibility to find out what they are getting into before they start something.

"Most people go into these things with a vision and they start implementing before they have done all of their homework," said Mr. Roach, director of the Norman Newman Centre for Entrepreneurship, part of Dalhousie University's faculty of management.

"Part of doing your homework is just trying to understand what you are getting yourself into."

Successful entrepreneurs are not people that take risk but are people who are uncomfortable with uncertainty, he said.

"The way they manage uncertainty is by actually doing enough upfront homework, whether it be talking to people and getting people that understand the business before they start to execute very high-cost parts of their business plan," he said.

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