

Dufferin County's largest employer against sale of Fiddle Park



Special to the Citizen

The big June date is the 7th for most of Ontario, but for Shelburne it is a few days earlier, on June 4, for that is the day that Town Council may decide whether or not to sell Fiddle Park for residential development.

The entire Council voted in favour of designating the land now known as Fiddle Park as being surplus land and therefore eligible to be sold off, however that one vote could be their undoing in this election year.

No one in Shelburne outside of Town Hall is happy about the prospect of losing Fiddle Park to another housing complex. From citizens to industry, the answer to the proposition is a resounding no.

The single largest employer in Dufferin County will be the first and most potentially adversely affected player in this field of aspirants. KTH Shelburne Mfg. Inc. has notified Shelburne Council of its objections to the proposed sale, with Blue Mountain Plastic soon to follow suite.

In his letter to the citizens of Shelburne, Shane Hall SVP/Plant Manager at KTH notes the organization was assured by council of the day back in 2003 that no residential properties would be built in close proximity to the plant, and that their subsequent investment and growth plans were and still are based upon that assurance.

KTH strongly opposes the use of Fiddle Park for residential development and their legal counsel has so informed the Town. Counsel for the company will also prepare a thorough analysis and formal response by the June 1 deadline.

According to Ed Crewson, who was the Mayor in 2003, KTH has indicated to him that the sale will jeopardize future job and expansion opportunities at the Shelburne plant and that in probability, those opportunities will migrate south, to Ohio. Ultimately, the decision could potentially influence KTH to relocate elsewhere in Ontario.

On another, local front, Council nominee Althea Casamento had this to say about the sale. She believes that Council should have been more considerate in the way they handled this matter. She feels many residents look at Fiddle Park as a landmark and, as such, hold an emotional attachment to it.

Many of the Town's events are held there and the Town's Service Clubs have all invested time and money in developing the park

into a place for the community to gather. Although in favour of growth, Althea feels that it needs to be strategically planned and protect the community landmarks and culture. She says the growth must show a value for community and for the future of it.

For her, this would lead to potential investors, businesses and residents wanting to, locate in Shelburne and become a part of a vibrant community.

The Service Clubs have unanimously voted to oppose this sale and so stated at a Council meeting held on Monday evening.

Their feeling is that this is a slap in their faces after all the effort and funds they have put forth to help build Fiddle Park. Likewise, both the BIA and the EDC have expressed reservations about the sale and the method by which it was brought forth.

The Holmes, Greg and Heather are equally upset and frankly do not know which way to turn in this debate. They feel betrayed by Council and do not know where their event will go from here. Their event, Pickin' in the Park, is the largest event of it's kind in Dufferin County, attracting over 300 travel trailers to the Park for the festivities. They and a host of contributors raised \$125,000 to build the pole barn that now graces the park and provides protection from the elements for all the many players who attend each year. Now, with only two more years available to them, if the sale goes ahead, they will likely fold up their tents and disappear into history as there is no place where this event could go to.

In the meantime, the deadline for submitting questions, comments or arguments against or in favour of the sale, is Friday, June 1st, 2018. Following that, Council will hold a public meeting, in Grace Tipling Hall on Monday, June 4th, 2018 at which time a decision one way or the other may well be forthcoming.