

Belfountain waits for development proposal

By Bill Rea

Residents of Belfountain see themselves as stewards of their community, as that is especially the case as they look at another possibility of development in their hamlet.

Close to 100 people were out Aug. 3 for a meeting organized by the Belfountain Community Organization (BCO). One of the main points to come out of the session is no one yet knows what's being proposed.

"This is a fabulous turnout," declared BCO Director Katherine Tremble-Taylor, who chaired the meeting. "We were expecting a fabulous turnout."

She stressed the aim of the meeting was to share information and gather input from the public.

BCO's summer newsletter stated John Spina has bought the lands to the south of Belfountain. While there is talk about what might be proposed for the lands, nothing is known yet.

BCO member Helen Notzl commented the lands have been eyed for development for years. There was a proposal for 166 lots on lands south of the hamlet between Mississauga and Shaws Creek Roads and north of the Grange Sideroad. The lands consist of farm fields and wooded areas, with the Town, Credit Valley Conservation (CVC) and the Niagara Escarpment Commission all having jurisdiction.

There was a newer proposal for 77 lots. Residents responded by raising concerns about water the environment and natural history. The Belfountain Task Force on Development was formed, with Notzl as the first chair. There was a lot of fundraising so the community could take the proposal to the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB). The effort was successful, as Notzl said the proposal was turned down, with the developer being directed to reimburse the residents.

Notzl observed there have been number of development proposal since then, but they have all been turned down.

She added the area can't support the types of densities that developers would want.

Water is a major issues there, she commented, both in terms of quantity and quality. She added it's not yet been determined how many homes the water table can handle.

Notzl also said BCO anticipates another development proposal is coming soon, so a fundraising committee has been struck so they can hire experts.

There will have to be a number of reports to various agencies, like Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) Town, CVC, NEC, etc. Notzl said BCO is regarded as a stakeholder, and will get access to those reports. She added until they see those reports, they don't know what's in the proposal, or what they can do.

She also pointed out NEC is the main approval agency in this case, and they could stop the whole thing, meaning BCO wouldn't need funds.

Judy Mabee of BCO said the land is regarded as part of a minor urban centre in the Niagara Escarpment Plan.

She also said there's talk that a much deeper aquifer has been found on site, which means there could be a lot of water there.

"Nothing's been confirmed yet," she said.

She also said the firm of Glen Schnarr and Associates are working with Spina on this.

Mabee said BCO will be asking that reports on the proposal be peer reviewed. She added Spina has indicated he's looking for community input. NEC, she observed, is not commenting on this new aquifer, as they are waiting for reports too.

"We have no information, whatsoever, yet," she declared.

She also said BCO has its own list of experts to check the reports.

"These are people of our choice," she said.

Councillor Barb Shaughnessy observed this is still early in the process, adding the real process has not even started yet.

She added she has met with Spina, and is sharing the information she's gained with BCO.

"We're ahead of the curve right now," she observed, adding the residents will need to see actual applications before they can act.

Maurica O'Connell spoke about the Development Application Review Team (DART) process, which is expected to start around the end of this month. She said she understood from representatives of Schnarr that it is a cumbersome, expensive process.

She also told the meeting it will be up to the developer to demonstrate to NEC the proposal is viable, and that NEC policies have to be respected.

"It's still up to NEC," she remarked.

Mabee pointed out the lands in question are part of the settlement area in the Escarpment Plan, meaning they are available for development. But if it happens, she said the community should have a voice in what needs to be there.

?There has to be a benefit for us if this comes,? she said, adding that could include features like pathways, trails, etc. ?Nothing is written in stone.?