

Concern development will impact protected lands

By Bill Rea

There's not much concern about the lands proposed for a 28-lot estate subdivision in the northeast part of town, but lots of concerns about the possible impacts on surrounding lands.

Those were the main issues raised last week at a public information meeting to discuss the proposed draft plan of subdivision and zoning for the development known as Halls Lake Estates development. It will take up about 56.3 hectares at the southeast corner of Old Church Road and Mount Wolfe Road at Lot 20, Concession 10, Albion.

The meeting was hosted by the town of Caledon.

This development proposal has been discussed for some time. James Kennedy, of KLM planning Partners Inc., said the discussions started in 1998.

'It's had a somewhat colourful history,' he added.

Rob Lavecchia, also of KLM, explained the proposed rezoning would implement the draft plan of subdivision.

The property is irregularly shaped and the northeast corner of the site comes very close to Hall Lake. Lavecchia said it contains both wetlands and woodlots.

He also said the property contains two policy areas in Caledon's Official Plan, one which allows residential development, while the other doesn't. That means about 23 of the 56 hectares can be developed, while other parcels are to be set aside for open space, environmental protection, storm drainage, etc. The development is slated mostly to the southern portion of the site, with large areas intended to remain in public ownership.

One issue that was raised a number of times is this matter is currently before the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB).

A pre-hearing conference was held Friday, where it was established that the developer referred the matter to OMB because the Town had not acted on the application within 180 days. Another pre-hearing conference has been scheduled for May 1, with the actual hearing now scheduled to start Oct. 5.

But there were a number of people at last Wednesday's meeting who asked why the session was even taking place, since OMB was now involved.

Casey Blakely, manager of development east for the Town of Caledon, said the idea was to let residents know what's going on, and that they can express concerns and get involved with the OMB process.

The impact on surrounding lands, much of which has been set aside for protection through easements, took up the bulk of discussion at the meeting.

Briony Glassco said her grandparents bought four of the surrounding properties in 1946; one in Caledon and the other three in neighbouring King Township. She said the lands couldn't be farmed because the topsoil has eroded, so they made a long-term commitment to return it to nature. Over the years, they have planted more than 250,000 trees there.

'It was a huge community engagement,' she said.

Ms. Glassco expressed concerns about Halls Lake, pointing out it's a kettle lake that feeds into the Lake Simcoe watershed. She wondered about the runoff from the development.

The development is slated for lands that straddle two watersheds, controlled by the Lake Simcoe and Region Conservation Authority (LSRCA) and Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA). She also observed the two municipalities that are involved, and was concerned that King was not represented at the meeting.

As well, Ms. Glassco was concerned about wetlands, pointing out they support a variety of wildlife, including two colonies of deer. The plan is to have the 28 lots serviced by individual septic system. Ms. Glassco wondered about the impacts on the groundwater from the septic systems. She said there's not been enough testing conducted.

She also added a lot of people were not aware that the matter is before OMB, and some were not given enough notice of last week's meeting.

'It doesn't look good when you don't consult the public properly,' she said.

Stephanie McVittie, senior development planner with the Town, said notices of the meeting were mailed out to surrounding property owners and signs have been posted on the property. As well, she said advertisements were placed in two Caledon papers, as well as one in King.

Ms. Glassco's brother Rufus had some more comments about his family's efforts to create a nature reserve on their lands.

He said they have posted signs warning illegal fishermen and poachers about trespassing, although he said it hasn't always stopped them. He said they don't want to have to act as game wardens, adding they might have to put up bigger fences to keep poachers out,

and that would impede the movement of animals.

Mr. Glassco also said the soils there are porous, adding they feed aquifers in the Oak Ridges Moraine. He also said roads in the proposed development will channel water, possibly resulting in it flowing into the lake.

Kennedy replied studies have been done on that, and the results will be submitted to the Town.

Mr. Glassco also expressed concerns with the naming the development Halls Lake Estates. Kennedy said that could be discussed, adding he's only been on the project about four months.

Conservation easements on the Glassco lands are held by the Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust (ORMLT). Susan Walmer, executive director of ORMLT, said there are 382.5 acres of protected land on the four properties. She said the lands have been kept as a wildlife refuge, and the plan is to maintain that. The problem, she said, is how to protect lands in perpetuity.

Just saying that doesn't make it happen,? she said.

Walmer also charged her group received no notice of the OMB hearing, adding neither did a lot of people in the nearby community.

Debbe Crandall, of Save the Oak Ridges Moraine (STORM) Coalition, said she understood these lands were regarded as transitional, but she wasn't sure if the proposal meets the necessary terms. She asked if the Town was ready to raise the issue as to whether this was transitional before OMB.

Blakely said the development application came in first in 1998, before the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan came into effect. She added studies have been updated to reflect the transitional provision in the Plan.

Tyler Glassco, Mr. and Ms. Glassco's nephew, wondered how much money the proposed subdivision will generate for the Town, and whether that's going to have any influence.

Mayor Allan Thompson said that was not known at this stage.