

Council approves seasonal wedding facility on west side

By Bill Rea

Wedding bells could soon be sounding at a property near the northwest corner of Caledon.

Town councillors recently accepted a planning staff recommendation to approve an application from Riepma Consultants Inc. (on behalf of Cambium Farms) to add a site specific to the general agricultural area designation in Caledon's Official Plan to allow a seasonal wedding facility there. Councillors, before voting on the issue, tightened the definition of 'seasonal' to specify between May 15 and the end of September.

Planners reported the property, at the southeast corner of Charleston Sideroad and Winston Churchill Boulevard, consists of almost 50 acres.

Council also approved a requested rezoning to allow a place of assembly on the property.

Planners added the site has previously been used for weddings, so the applications would legally permit the use.

The plan is to have these events take place in an existing barn and carriage house. There are no provisions for food preparation or cooking on site, as the food would be provided by caterers. There are also no plans for permanent washroom facilities.

A public information meeting on the application was held last year, and noise was among the issues and concerns raised there.

Planners reported a noise assessment study was conducted and various mitigation methods were suggested.

Cambium Farms had approached the Town late in 2013 to find out what approvals are needed to allow for occasional weddings.

Planners observed such a use was not in keeping with agricultural policies in the Official Plan, nor was it permitted in an agricultural zone. As well, they pointed out there would be building modifications needed to bring them into compliance with the Ontario Building Code and Fire Code. These would be permanent measures, preventing the site from returning to agricultural use.

Planners also stated building permit applications for the modifications were submitted to the Town in March.

The property already contains a house, which is also used as an office for a landscaping business. Planners said that's not a permitted use in this zoning or designation, but there are plans to move the business because it may not be compatible with weddings.

There are also fields on the property that are farmed by a neighbour, and it's proposed that will continue.

Randy McLeod, of the Peel Federation of Agriculture (PFA), said he had been representing the Federation on this matter previously before council, opposing it. He added he was representing himself before council on this occasion (he said he had only found out this matter was coming before council days before, and there was no time to consult the Federation) and observed the wedding facility has nothing to do agriculture.

He added this facility has been operating illegally for some time, and Town bylaw officials have not been enforcing the rules. He said this sends out the idea that people can convert agricultural buildings to an illegal use, and then go to council for a rezoning.

'Bylaw did act,' Mayor Allan Thompson quickly responded.

Public Works Director David Loveridge said his staff has been on site, as well as staff from the fire department.

Fire Chief David Forfar said this matter came to the attention of his department about two years ago. He said charges were laid, but they have been delayed in the courts. He also told Councillor Rob Mezzapelli those charges had no bearing on council's discussions.

McLeod observed agriculture is seeing more diversification and secondary uses, all aimed at helping farm operations.

'We don't see any agricultural operation that's branching from this,' he said.

Shaw's Creek Road resident John Wilson said his daughter was planning to have her wedding at the facility. If there are enough weddings in a season, he said it will bring a lot of visiting traffic to the area, including money for local businesses, providing such things as accommodation, flowers, food, wedding cakes, etc.

He pointed out closing the facility will impact these families planning weddings, along with the businesses that could profit from them. 'These are not the businesses and people that should be penalized,' he declared.

Mary Hall, director of development approval and planning policy for the Town, had trouble setting the timelines on how quickly all the requirements could be completed. She told Councillor Barb Shaughnessy she hadn't seen a site plan application yet. She said there's usually a 30-day turnaround period once application materials have been circulated to various agencies, and if there are any changes, the material has to be recirculated.

Councillor Doug Beffort said the discussion was 'bringing this to a point of reality.'

He observed that 25 years ago, weddings were held in churches, but people today are looking for unique locations, like barns. He added a site-specific zoning for part of the property will not impact on the whole farm.

Beffort also pointed out the Town is 'struggling' to attract new business to Ward 1.

'It's really important for us to look at this as a global issue,' he remarked.

?We all make mistakes,? he added. ?We're looking at a lot of brides. We're looking at a lot of business.? Councillor Nick deBoer said he plans to attend two weddings this summer, and both will be on farms. Mezzapelli voiced his support for the application. ?I'm glad it's a constrained rezoning that we're doing,? he said.