

Council backing call for funding of Badlands plan

By Bill Rea

Residents who are opposed to the proposed parking lot for the Cheltenham Badlands site now have Caledon council on side. Councillor passed a motion Tuesday calling on mayor Marolyn Morrison to send a letter to Premier Kathleen Wynne asking her government to fully fund the Cheltenham Badlands Management Plan.

This is what's foes of the proposed parking lot have been calling for in a petition that's addressed to the Province. It specifies the Plan includes fencing around the site, viewing platforms, boardwalks, trail maintenance, etc.

Morrison also got council's support to ask the Niagara Escarpment Commission for site plan control on the Badlands.

Concerns have been expressed over the safety of people visiting the site. There is currently no designated parking area, meaning cars have to be parked at the side of the road where there are numerous steep hills. Sightlines in the area are a worry too.

The Badlands are owned by the Ontario Heritage Trust and managed by Bruce Trail Conservancy.

The site is a deposit of Queenston Shale on the south side of Olde Base Line Road, between Chinguacousy and Creditview Roads.

The soil and vegetation have been worn away at the site by erosion, and the result is a formation of red rock with deep gullies running through it.

Peel Regional council in May approved the construction of a parking area just east of the site that would be able to accommodate 33 cars and two buses. There are also plans to set up a viewing area.

The motion came up after council received a couple of delegations representing opponents to the proposal, although they were officially commenting on Caledon's proposed tourism strategy.

Irene Reimanis-Aziz stated that the proposed parking lot has been in the planning stages for seven years and has involved seven agencies, but local residents were never informed of the plan or involved until May.

Olde Base Line is a Regional Road, and the Region is trying to address safety issues. But Reimanis-Aziz argued it was the Region itself that created those issues by taking out guard rails at the sides of the road and paving shoulders, allowing for more parking. She said the region has come up with the parking lot idea, and the agencies in charge of managing the site have signed off on it.

She observed that the road is busy and dangerous, but added it's a commuter route. She also said it's the only access road Inglewood firefighters have to the west. Reimanis-Aziz pointed out the road could be blocked by cars lined up to get into the parking lot, thus delaying fire trucks in an emergency.

Councillor Allan Thompson told her the guardrails had been taken out to make it easier for fire trucks to get through.

?The suits in Mississauga and Brampton do not understand the lay of the land,? Reimanis-Aziz charged.

She also said the Badlands are a unique asset, representing one of the few areas for potential growth in geo-tourism. But she said nothing has been done by those operating the site to curb the erosion or control access.

Councillor Richard Paterak observed that the matter went before the Region in 2004 as a liability issue.

The Heritage Trust, he said, ?stone walled? council because it had no money. He also observed the site has the wrong owner and the wrong care-taker. The safety issues have to be addressed, and he said the federal and Provincial governments should get involved, suggesting the site be part of the Ontario Parks System.

Reimanis-Aziz commented that a way to link assets and villages in Town is through a shuttle bus service.

Councillor Doug Beffort reacted to that idea, pointing out it used to be possible to drive up to Niagara Falls, but one has to take a bus or walk to get there.

Reimanis-Aziz countered the falls still exist, but the Badlands could be destroyed if people aren't pro-active.

Councillor Gord McClure pointed out that a parking lot would mean places for 33 cars other than at the side of the road. He added he has grandchildren and would never want them restricted from seeing the Badlands.

But Councillor Nick deBoer countered it might leave room for more cars to park on the road.

?It's a curious and dangerous road to travel on at the best of times,? remarked area resident Bonnie Ledson.

She also pointed out the Badlands are likely to attract a lot more visitors in the fall.

?The site tells us much,? Ledson declared, citing the Queenston shale, which is some 445 million years old. ?We are the stewards of the land. All of us are the stewards of the land.?

As well, Ledson observed that since 2000, the site has been managed by the Bruce Trail Conservancy and a host of volunteers.

Caledon is rich in volunteers, but she stressed stewards are needed to protect the Badlands. She said some three metres have been worn away from the site since 1973. Human traffic has been having a big impact, she maintained.

Councillor Rob Mezzapelli pointed out there was advertisements for the Badlands at the Canadian National Exhibition, as well as at

Pearson International Airport, so it's not just a Caledon issue now.

McClure agreed.

?This is bigger than us,? he said.

He also commented that the potential viewing platform could be a way to make money, adding the parking lot could be part of it.

Paterak commented Regional Chair and CEO?Emil Kolb was in Ireland recently and he saw pictures of the Badlands there.