

Council wants briefing on Badlands accessibility

By Bill Rea

Caledon's Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) has several items of input to offer regarding the Cheltenham Badlands, but Caledon councillors are not yet ready to pass them on to Peel Regional officials.

After a lengthy, and sometimes heated, discussion Tuesday, councillors decided to hold off on action until they have received a presentation on the matter from Regional authorities.

The Badlands property is owned by the Ontario Heritage Trust (OHT) and is managed by the Bruce Trail Conservancy (BTC). The site is on the south side of Olde Base Line Road, east of Creditview Road, is one of Ontario's geological treasures, as well as one of the best examples of badland topography in the province. Due to removal of vegetation during land clearing and livestock grazing in the early 1900s, the topsoil has eroded into a series of hummocks and gullies, producing the distinctive landscape of Queenston shale.

The 36.6-hectare property was acquired in 2002 by OHT. Today, the Badlands is recognized as a provincially significant Area of Natural and Scientific Interest (ANSI).

There has been concern over the last couple of years regarding people wearing down the feature by excessively walking on it. There have also been traffic concerns on Olde Base Line.

Serguei Kabanov, project manager for the Region on the Badlands project, made a presentation to AAC at their July 14 meeting. The committee approved a resolution Aug. 11 calling for a number of provisions, pertaining to the parking lot at the site that's been proposed. There are also plans to create an accessible parking space on the south side of Olde Base Line, west of the proposed parking lot. The AAC resolution, which was included in Tuesday's agenda of the General Committee of council, calls for that parking spot to be moved to a safer location and that it meet the provisions of the Town's Traffic Bylaw.

As well, the committee has called on the Region to build an accessible internal walkway from the parking lot to the proposed viewing platform of the site and have that included in the Badlands Master Plan.

In addition, the committee asked the Region to reconsider the timelines for the project until all accessibility and safety concerns have been addressed.

Councillors also heard from AAC Chair Maureen Tymkow, who stated the motion they presented simply raises important concerns regarding the enjoyment of the site. She pointed out the Badlands attracts a lot of visitors, although parking there has been a concern for some time (parking is currently prohibited along Olde Base Line in the area of the site, and the area is fenced off).

Tymkow said the proposed accessible spot on the side of the road is not safe, pointing out it's on the crest of a hill and close to where traffic will be passing.

She also stressed the recommendations from the committee are reasonable and will have a positive impact on the site. She also agreed there will always be natural factors that will restrict access to the site, but it should be possible to add features that allow more people to view it.

'I'm not really sure where we're going to go with this,' Mayor Allan Thompson commented, pointing out the Town is just a commenting agency. He said the recommendations should go before the group working on the project.

Councillor Annette Groves agreed, suggesting the AAC contact the Regional Clerk for inclusion with the Region's Accessibility Committee.

Councillor Johanna Downey said she was appreciative of the work of AAC, but she pointed out the Town is a partner on the Badlands Management Team and she thought that council supporting the recommendation would be 'contradictory.' She said there would be plenty of opportunities to express concerns to the team, and she said she would be willing to help set up a meeting with them and OHT.

Groves said council support of the recommendation would carry more teeth than setting up a meeting.

Councillor Nick deBoer expressed the desire for more information, commenting he wanted to hear the Region's position. He said a lot of work would have been done at the Region, and they would be interested in finding the best solution possible. DeBoer suggested Kabanov be asked to update council.

Thompson suggested the AAC recommendations be referred to the management group.

Councillor Rob Mezzapelli agreed with the importance of having complete information, including how accessibility issues have been accommodated by the management team.

Councillor Barb Shaughnessy was surprised her colleagues weren't ready to support the recommendations, charging if they keep 'dragging our feet,' it will never get to the Region.