

CVC?needs to listen to Belfountain residents

Credit Valley Conservation (CVC) recently held its second consultation with the residents of Belfountain regarding the repurposing of the local park from a family recreational destination to a learning complex promoting the ecological views of the authority.

CVC will build a visitor centre that will be used for a variety of unspecified functions. Additional parking will be added, resulting in less park, and off-site parking locations are being sought so more people can be bused to the park. There will be concessions to sell to the park visitors. Officials claim not to know if additional revenue will be generated.

The metamorphosis of the park is obscured by statements about the need for restoration and maintenance. It is obvious that the park could use a facelift after years of neglect by CVC. The architectural firm is proposing interesting faux historic structures and neat garden centre landscaping. It would have the aesthetics of a Niagara Parkway Park as opposed to an Algonquin Park. Signage would inform you of what you are looking at thereby ?enhancing? the visitor's experience.

The Mack Dam and headpond were subject to an environmental assessment by Amec Foster Wheeler Environment and Infrastructure. There are various options available under the plan. The final decision will be made by CVC, which states no decision has been made to the fate of the dam. Yet their web site recommends that the dam should go. Their stated policy of creating a Natural Heritage System is at odds with the retention of the dam.

To gain the community's acceptance, CVC is offering free admission, the use of the visitor centre for community functions and local merchants the first opportunity at running the concessions. Despite this, the community stands firm against the Complex.

CVC is not hearing that the park is filled to capacity already; creating traffic congestion, parking, noise and pollution problems.

Mack Park is in the hamlet of Belfountain, any change to the park by CVC is essentially usurping the planning process of the community.

The people of Belfountain may think the CVC consultative process is a request to make these changes, but the consultative process is just a box to check off on their due diligence list. They have the authority under the Conservation Authorities Act, Sec. 21, 28, to do as they please. They operate independent from municipal government and in this case separate from the Ministry of Natural Resources.

What Belfountain needs is a political champion who will instill some democracy into this process and take the concerns of the people to Natural Resources and Forestry Minister Michael Coteau.

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