

Parking banned near the Badlands

By Bill Rea

It is now against the law to park on Olde Base Line Road near the Cheltenham Badlands.

Peel Regional council last week easily accepted the staff recommendation to implement no-stopping provisions on both sides of the road between Creditview and Chinguacousy Roads.

Councillors also went along with a staff recommendation to release \$300,000 from money that had been set aside for a parking lot near the site so they could start work on the design. The parking lot is seen as one component in a master plan for the Badlands. That part of the motion drew opposition from a couple of councillors, especially Barb Shaughnessy of Caledon, and local residents who made deputations.

The Badlands, owned by the Ontario Heritage Trust (OHT) and managed by Bruce Trail Conservancy (BTC), are a deposit of Queenston Shale on the south side of Olde Base Line. 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. The site has been attracting many tourists and other visitors, and over the last couple of years, concerns have developed that all that foot traffic is wearing away the feature. As well, parking has been a concern because the road in that area is winding with many hills.

Regional council last year approved spending \$1 million for a parking lot east of the site to accommodate 33 cars and two school buses. The Niagara Escarpment Commission (NEC) approved the development permit for the project in May 2014, but local resident Bonnie Ledson filed an appeal.

Staff reported council had put the money on hold in September until there's comprehensive plan for the site.

Ledson told councillors last week that the site is protected by the Niagara Escarpment Plan and the Region's and Town's Official Plans.

She added the popularity of the site has grown over 15 years as more people have found out about it.

Studies indicated there were 992 vehicles there Thanksgiving Day 2011, which Ledson said meant some 2,000 people on the site.

There are no designated foot paths, education material or supervision. "The visitors think of it as the stop, stomp, litter and leave experience," she said.

She also said management of the site is a huge task for a volunteer outfit like BTC.

Ledson said Stonehenge in England is 5,000 years old, but is protected. That's not the case with the Badlands, which she said is 445 million years old.

She also said that since the matter is under appeal, releasing the funds to work on the parking lot is contrary to the hearing process.

Ledson also said there has been no thorough study of the site, and residents are anxious to be part of such discussions.

Caledon Councillor Annette Groves wondered why the Region would commit \$1 million to a property it doesn't even own or manage.

Area resident Irene Reimanis-Aziz raised safety concerns, dealing with emergency vehicles being blocked by parked cars. Olde Base Line is an arterial road, she said, meaning it's supposed to be able to through traffic with as little interference as possible. She added the area is served by the fire hall in Inglewood, and the road is the only access to areas to the northwest (she said Forks of the Credit Road can't handle trucks and the Grange Sideroad is closed in winter).

She also observed the shoulders on Olde Base Line were paved about 10 years ago to facilitate parking.

"It was a bad idea and no one is accepting responsibility for that mistake," she said.

She also urged council uphold the motion from September, as many people depend on Olde Base Line as a Regional road.

"I am 100 per cent in support of tourism," Reimanis-Aziz told Shaughnessy, "but what's happened at the Badlands is not tourism."

She also commented on the fence that has gone up at the site in the last couple of weeks. "I see it as a temporary measure," she said.

Former councillor Ian Sinclair said he was disappointed with the situation on the property, calling it "chaos" of trespassers, litter, photo shoots, bikes and ATVs.

He also said freeing up the \$300,000 was showing contempt for the appeal process.

Sean Fraser of OHT told councillors they were concerned about safety too, commenting there is no safe and legal parking near the Badlands.

The area being eyed for the parking lot is a piece of tableland. The proposal, he said, has the support of Peel transportation staff, and all the Regional agencies.

Fraser said the lot will answer the demand for parking at the site about 90 per cent of the time. He said it won't solve all the problems, but added it would be a good first step.

Fraser told Brampton Councillor John Sprovieri there was a long process to look for a parking area. This is only part of the property that was deemed an approvable area.

'It's been a team effort,' he said.

There's a lot of interest and engagement in the process from the public, he said.

Fraser called for releasing the \$300,000 so staff can act fast once it's clear where the process is going.

'Everyone wants to get to the same location,' Sprovieri observed.

'I think the fence is marvelous,' Shaughnessy commented, adding she drives the road about four times per week, and has noticed improvements.

'We had everything from porno movies to people trampling it,' she commented. 'It was really quite crazy.'

There are signs that people are respecting the fence now.

Groves commented there has to be some commitment from the Province on this. She added there should be no spending of Peel's money until a comprehensive plan is in place.

Commissioner of Public Works Dan Labrecque said a final plan has not come forward.

'We're not looking to build anything,' he said.

'I'm not sure I'm understanding what's the rush,' Shaughnessy remarked.

She said the fence has solved about half the problems, and posting signs warning people their cars will be towed if they park there will solve another 40 per cent.

Councillor Johanna Downey, who has the Badlands in her ward, supported freeing the money. She said future generations deserve to enjoy the site in safety, and the parking lot is a first step.

'It's up to us to take the lead here,' she commented.

Shaughnessy didn't think the lot would address the parking demands, so she wondered where the rest of the cars are to go.

'Sometimes common sense just doesn't make sense,' she remarked.

She also said the appeal might be successful, so the \$300,000 would be wasted.

'I am not gambling with my taxpayers' money,' she declared.

'This is a very difficult one,' Mississauga Councillor Nando Iannicca, who's also the chair of Credit Valley Conservation (CVC).

'You can see all sides on this one. This thing's a mess.'

He added the parking lot will make the situation safer, 'but what a horrible place to put a parking lot!'

Labrecque said the lot would solve most of the problem. The only way to solve the whole situation would be with a multi-level lot, and that's not going to happen.

'The road is not walkable,' he added, pointing out the lot will offer access to the Badlands