

Residents want rural Belfountain kept rural

By Bill Rea

There's considerable opposition to plans being considered for Belfountain, and officials at Peel Region and the Ministry of the Environment (MOE) will soon be hearing about it.

About 50 people were on hand Monday night for a meeting hosted by the Belfountain Community Organization.

The meeting was essentially an update on the current issues impacting on the hamlet, but one of the last activities saw participants filling out ballots regarding recommendations from Peel Region for work on the streets in the area.

A study of the roads around Belfountain, commissioned by the Region, was completed earlier this year. It recommended improvements for Bush Street, Old Main Street and Mississauga Road in the hamlet, including sidewalks, curbs, parking lanes, paved shoulders, etc.

BCO circulated a petition in response to these recommendations in July, collecting more than 300 signatures in the first two days. It was addressed to the Province and called for the protection of "the water, environment, and heritage character of the Hamlet of Belfountain and environs."

The ballots filled out at Monday's meeting asked if people favoured a paved, urban landscape for Belfountain, or a natural, rural one. BCO President Jenni Le Forestier reported the next morning that the assembly voted 98 per cent in favour of the natural, rural landscape, with the other two per cent abstaining.

Le Forestier said that information will be forwarded to BCO's lawyers, who will pass it on to the Region and MOE.

She told the meeting if the Region's proposal goes through, it will mean wider roads, trees will be lost, some people will lose parts of their front yards and there will be complications from drainage issues. She also mentioned a plan to add more street lights, which she said would block out the night sky.

She told the meeting that have been other issues BCO has been working on.

"Let me tell you, it's been an education," she remarked, adding it's involved meetings with representatives from the Town of Caledon, Region, Credit Valley Conservation (CVC) and Niagara Escarpment Commission (NEC). "It hasn't been easy."

The recent effort of the group have included distributing free lawn signs bearing the message "Stop Sprawl."

Le Forestier said the campaign is aimed at creating awareness among visitors to the area, as well as politicians. Sprawl impacts other communities, she said, although she added Belfountain "is on a precipice right now."

The issues include plans for intensification by the Province. Growth in Brampton and other places is going to increase pressures on Belfountain, Le Forestier warned.

There are still concerns over a large proposed subdivision that Le Forestier said could double the size of the hamlet. There are fears this growth could overwhelm existing facilities, as well as impact the local water supply.

The Town's efforts to boost tourism has some people worried, especially when it comes to crowds and parking.

Le Forestier mentioned an idea from CVC "to expand Belfountain Conservation Area, including increasing the parking area to accommodate 75 cars. There are thoughts of putting in a concessions stand, which Le Forestier said would mean more litter and other garbage.

One man said he had heard CVC has plans to remove a waterfall on the site, but another man said he understood that would be an environmental step, aimed at enabling salmon and trout to spawn upstream.

Le Forestier said she had heard NEC doesn't expect this project to go through.

"We're slightly optimistic that common sense will prevail," she said.

She also suggested a heritage designation should be sought from the Province for Belfountain.

"It is a lengthy public process she said, adding it was recommended in a 2003 report to the Town, and Heritage Caledon agreed. Le Forestier said the matter will be going before Town council some time next year.

Le Forestier explained the heritage designation would take in the whole landscape of the area; not just the buildings.

She also said they have researched other places that have heritage designations, and the results have been positive.

Opposition to these various developments drew a lot of support from those at the meeting, as other issues were discussed.

One man said he's noticed a decline in the flows from his well. "It was really noticeable," he said, commenting it takes decades to refill an aquifer if it's drained.

Le Forestier said it will be worse if a 66-lot subdivision is built. She added there are concerns that the local water supply won't sustain something like that.

As well, she said it will mean more paved roads, which mean salt in the winter getting into wells.