

Second parking lot could serve Cheltenham Badlands

By Bill Rea

Of the four concepts being proposed for the Cheltenham Badlands, there seems to be support for the most comprehensive one.

That was the indication coming out of the community forum held last week.

About 30 people were on hand for the session, and there were some who didn't like any of the concepts.

The property is owned by the Ontario Heritage Trust (OHT).

The Badlands, located on the south side of Olde Base Line Road, east of Creditview Road, is one of Ontario's geological treasures and 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, and is managed by the Bruce Trail Conservancy (BTC). 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.

Chris Manhood of OHT, who was facilitating the meeting, said the four concepts build on each other, but they all have common elements, including the proposed parking lot on Olde Base Line, an accessible parking spot to the west of the parking lot, a looped trail and a pedestrian walkway with a barrier. The concepts range from a single looped trail and a closed side trail to more loops and open side trails, more walkway on Olde Base Line and a 48-spot parking lot on Creditview Road, at the southwest corner of the property.

Not all were in support, however. There were some at the meeting who were ready to reject all four because they included the parking lot on Olde Base Line. There were also some complaints that input offered by the public has been ignored.

One man observed the fourth concept contained "more of everything."

Kendrick Doll of OHT told the audience work is progressing on a master plan process for the Badlands. A consulting firm has been brought in, and there have already been a number of public sessions. This process has resulted in the development of the four concepts.

He said they are looking for input on the four, with the plan to get it narrowed down to a preferred concept.

"We're listening to your feedback," he said.

Doll said the four concepts were based on a set of guiding principles and priorities, which included conservation of the site's cultural and natural heritage values, safety for people visiting the site, improving accessibility and enhancing the opportunities for interpretation and public education.

Protecting the site remains one of the main priorities, he said, adding safety measures will be implemented too. He also said the fencing around the site will remain in place.

Doll commented that implementing the master plan is going to require time and money. A phased approach is going to be used, as he pointed out there have already been some steps taken. Doll cited the reduction in the speed limit in the area, closing the site to people walking on the shale and wearing it down, etc. He pointed out, however, there is still a safety issue on Olde Base Line.

The first phase covers construction of the Olde Base Line parking lot, the accessible parking spot and the walkway. It was also to include trail improvement and installing educational signs along the trail. He pointed out it delivers on the guiding principles.

Steve Ganesh, acting strategist with Peel Region's Transportation Division, commented the approval of the Olde Base Line parking lot had been appealed, but that was dismissed last month. Regional council subsequently freed up \$700,000 to proceed with the project. He added the Region is going ahead with it because of the safety concerns.

Ganesh said there have been traffic studies that indicate the proposed lot will be able to address parking demand there about 90 per cent of the time. He agreed there will be other times (fall colours, etc.) when demand will likely exceed supply.

He added the Town and Region are working together on a number of fronts.

Project Manager Serguei Kabanov repeated that traffic studies have shown there's been a safety issue related to illegal parking and traffic that needed to be addressed. While the site has been close and parking in the area prohibited, he said there are still people stopping there, and there have been cases of trespassing.

The plan is to make modifications to the trail to help people get from the parking lot to the Badlands site. The walkway is proposed to assist those who can't use the trail.

The proposed lot will be able to accommodate 33 cars and two school buses, and will include connection points with the trail, as

well as bicycle racks.

There were calls for designated bike lanes in the area. Ganesh said that has been looked into, but he didn't think there enough room in the right-of-way.

Kabanov said the parking lot design calls for a four per cent slope to allow for drainage. The run-off will be collected in vegetative swails to water the new plantings around the lot. He said it will be paved to allow for pavement markings.

The proposed walkway will be 240 metres long and 1.8 metres wide. Kabanov said it will include an elevated curb, pedestrian railing and a guide rail. There will be a two per cent slope toward the road for runoff, as well as decorative edging.

He also said the changing grades on the road prevent it from complying with Ontarians with Disabilities Act.

One man observed walking along the road is dangerous, but Doll it wouldn't be possible to build accessible routes on the site, commenting "that sort of engineered infrastructure" would never get approved.

Addressing the accessible parking spot, Kabanov said it will be on the south side of the road, and only eastbound traffic will be able to use it. There will be no U-turns permitted. He also said it will be large enough for Tranship vehicles to use easily.

"Let's face it," one woman commented later. "There will be U-turns."

There were concerns that there will be surges in visitors going to the site, and the proposed parking lot will not be able to handle them. One woman pointed out the lot will encourage more visitors.

Doll observed the parking lot is seen as an initial step in addressing traffic issues. Other ideas being considered include shuttle buses and closing the site to vehicles except school buses during peak periods.

He also expressed appreciation for all the valuable feedback.

"You're not listening," one woman charged.

Doll countered they are working with various stakeholders to implement best practices.

"We are listening," he maintained, adding the safety issues mean the parking lot has to go ahead.

Addressing the benefits of the four concepts, there were also comments that not enough is being done to address the safety of cyclists, whose numbers are increasing in Caledon.

One man wondered if accommodating two school buses was sufficient. He was worried there could be a backlog of buses.

Councillor Johanna Downey thought schools would book their times. She said her children go on school trips to the Jack Smythe Field Centre near Terra Cotta, and the facility is never overrun with buses.

One man suggested starting with the first concept and build on it, identifying issues as things progress.

He also said not having designated cycling lanes might be safer than trying squeeze one in.