

Town and TRCA studying revision of Bolton Special Policy Area

By Bill Rea

Bolton's Special Policy Area (SPA), governing the flood plain in the village core is currently subject to a review and update. About 50 people were on hand last Monday for a public presentation on the study, and the fact the meeting was going on during heavy rains, which caused considerable flooding to some places to the south, did not go unnoticed.

"You picked a pretty appropriate night for your meeting," one man in the audience observed.

The study is being conducted for the Town and Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) by MMM Group Limited. The study on the SPA started in April, and Marisa Williams, senior policy planner for the Town, said last week's session was the second open house that had been held on the issue. She added they were getting to the end of the first phase of the study, and that there will still be lots of chance for public input.

The SPA was established about 30 years ago as a method of making sure flood risks are being properly managed, while making sure future planning needs of the Town and the viability of the core are being considered.

An update of the SPA is deemed needed because of changing planning policies over the last 30 years, as well as the availability of updated information, including technical data and flood plain mapping.

The SPA was put in place to allow for some development in the flood plain that normally would not be allowed, owing to Provincial policy. It was aimed at allowing a limited scope of development and redevelopment to help maintain a vibrant community.

Chris Tyrrell, of MMM Group, said the possible risks have all been agreed to by the Town and TRCA, as well as the Province, which approved the SPA.

Addressing the planning context, Tyrrell commented that the Town's Official Plan has policies for the Bolton core aimed at enhancing its vitality and diversity. The focus is on retail and service commercial uses, while there is also interest in building on the historic character of the area, as well as promoting the Humber River as a public asset.

Explaining a regulatory flood plain, Tyrrell said TRCA uses computer models, as well as data from actual storms to define the limits in which flooding is likely to occur. Hurricane Hazel, which took place in 1954, is the historic flood of record, and its information is used to calculate flood plains.

He added that while TRCA has been able to revise and update its flood plain mapping, there have not been a lot of changes as a result.

The existing requirements for the SPA in Bolton state that all new structures are supposed to be protected from the elevation of a regulatory flood, but if that's not achievable, protection from the one-in-500-year flood can be used, with limits on allowed uses. In addition to municipal approvals, TRCA has to permit the development too.

Flood mitigation measures have been put in place since the early 1980s, such as berms, culverts, bridges, etc.

Tyrrell said they have been working on a flood risk assessment report. A draft has been completed.

He added the second phase of the study will include looking at individual buildings to understand the potential risk that they face. Tyrrell also observed the Town is working on an intensification study for all of Caledon, although the SPA is part of that. The second phase of the SPA study will work on coordinating the two efforts.

Concern was raised at the meeting over the evening's flooding in Toronto.

Sameer Dhalla, manager of water resources with TRCA, said they were monitoring all of the watershed, and had determined the levels were up about a metre in the SPA.

He added any new development in the SPA would require controls to maintain flows in the river.

Tyrrell told one woman at the meeting the SPA allows for limited development, and one of the aims of the study is to define those limits.

There were concerns expressed over contradictions between the limits imposed within the SPA and the intensification study. Tyrrell said the intensification study is town-wide, while the SPA is governed by Provincial policies, allowing limited scopes of development and infill. He added the SPA is not to be used for intensification unless all alternatives have been explored.