

TRCA?seeking input on uses for Bolton Camp property

By Bill Rea

Many ideas are being considered for using the Bolton Camp property, and Caledon councillors got the chance to offer their input Tuesday.

Their ideas included fields for football and field hockey, among other possible uses.

Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) acquired the property on the east side of the village last year.

Darryl Grey, manager of education with TRCA, was before council Tuesday to outline some of the preliminary proposals for the site. He said one of the aims of the project is to preserve the heritage aspects of the property.

It was established as a camp more than 90 years ago.

Grey said they are also looking for opportunities to involve the Town.

One of the ideas he mentioned was to create a central area, which would involve the restoration of the sports fields on the site, which have been subjected to vandalism. He suggested they could be used as soccer fields. There has also been talk of an outdoor fitness and healthy area near the fields, with new trails and possibly an area for Yoga. Grey said there have been visions of parents taking classes there, etc., while their kids play soccer. There has also been thought given to a green fitness forest nearby.

As well, Grey mentioned the idea of a tree-top adventure area. He said there are facilities like that at other conservation areas, like Heart Lake, Bruce's Mill and Kortright. He added these could represent revenue-generating opportunities.

Grey said at times, those coming up with ideas for the camp property have found themselves wondering "What would Rick Mercer do?"

One of the results has been the idea of zorbing area, in which people get into a large ball and are rolled down a hill.

"There is not enough money in this world to get me to go zorbing," Councillor Patti Foley said.

Thought has also been given to finding uses for the dining hall. It has only ever been available for about half the year, but Grey said they are looking for ways to have it used all year.

"It's really important that we get some year-round use on the site," he told councillors.

He said there has also been thought given to creating an arts component on the property, possibly with facilities for theatre and drama, as well as an artist-in-residence program.

Grey stressed they want the uses on the property to reflect community needs, as well as involve local young people and businesses.

"This is a jewel," Mayor Marolyn Morrison observed. "I think it's really exciting that the TRCA has grabbed ahold of this."

"The whole area's going to benefit," she added.

Foley observed it's great that TRCA wants to get young people involved.

Grey told her they are hoping to have meetings with stakeholders sometime in the New Year. He added they are very interested in coming up with employment opportunities for youth in the hopes that they will take some ownership of the site and discourage vandalism.

Councillor Nick deBoer commented that some of the local high schools have programs aimed at healthy living, and the property to be useful in that regard.

There were a couple of councillors who weren't convinced that soccer was the best possible use for the sports fields. DeBoer was one of them, suggesting there is also need for open space and picnic areas. He said there are other areas with soccer fields, such as Edelweiss Park. TRCA, he suggested, has more of a track record when it comes to passive uses.

Grey stressed they want the uses to reflect the needs of the community, adding things can evolve there as the community evolves.

It was Councillor Allan Thompson who mentioned there are a lot of calls for rugby fields in town. He said there is a waiting list for young people wanting to play in Brampton, and some local kids have to travel to Fergus. He also said there's demand for field hockey, as well as possibly cricket.

Grey pointed out the process is just starting, and they are really seeking input.

"We're really at the early stage at this point," he commented.

"Congratulations to you for your creative vision here," Thompson added.

Councillor Richard Whitehead, who also sits on TRCA, called this "very exciting project," adding there have been efforts to come up with core funding for the work. Peel Region has come up with a contribution, he said.

Whitehead was also pleased there will be an advisory committee in place continuously. He said a core of interested people from the community will help move the public input forward.

He also pointed out TRCA took on the property because of numerous problems, such as the vandalism that had been going on. He

added there's been no forest management in more than 30 years.

Whitehead also agreed the playing fields need to be used for more than just soccer. They need to be multi-use, and that point has to be promoted to people interested in such activities as field hockey, football or even archery. "These fields are the fields for them," he said is the message that must get out.

He added expanded uses will see more people on the site, and such multi-use fields are also easier to maintain.

Councillor Gord McClure agreed the plans are "pretty exciting," but he also lamented the Bolton Camp property is not very convenient for people living on the west side of town.

"I'm a little bit envious," he said. "We're still the forgotten part of town."

Morrison reminded him Terra Cotta Conservation Area and the Credit River are on the west side.

Councillor Richard Paterak expressed the hope there will be community access to the local trails, pointing out the more people who are using them, the more who can watch out for vandalism.

He too was confident that user groups could be found if rugby was available.

"I think there's lots and lots of potential here," he observed.

Foley also suggested engaging the local school boards on this, since there will be students looking to fulfil their required volunteer hours.