

## Vision for badlands discussed at public meeting

By Angela Gismondi

The Ontario Heritage Trust (OHT) has presented a few options for the future of the Cheltenham Badlands.

A third public meeting to discuss the Cheltenham Badlands Master Plan was held at the Inglewood Community Centre last Wednesday.

OHT, which owns the property, hosted the meeting along with Dillon Consulting and Museum Planning Partners.

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).

To date, there have been three public meetings on the matter, a residents' forum, a business forum and an online survey.

"I really appreciate all the interest you have shown," Sean Fraser of OHT told the pack house at the meeting. "We want to make sure we find the best solution for this amazing site."

Fraser also provided an update on the parking lot proposed for the site. The Niagara Escarpment Commission (NEC) had approved a 1,670 square metre asphalt parking lot for the site in May 2014. A local resident launched an appeal a month later and a hearing took place in February. NEC hearing officers released their ruling recently and dismissed the appeal.

Many ideas came out of the forums, explained Caroline Marshall from Dillon Consulting. In terms site development, many believe public access to the badlands should be limited to viewing only, and site conservation and environmental experience should be considered. There is also support for an enhanced and looped trail system through the property, limiting access to less sensitive natural areas and increased opportunities for interpretation, photography and other art pursuits. Parking on the site received mixed reviews. While some were opposed, others supported on-site parking.

"We have had some very productive meetings," said Fraser. "Some very good ideas that we need to roll into the master plan process came out of those meetings . . . the goal in the months ahead is to take all this feedback and work towards a preferred option."

In terms of site management, most agreed that the master plan recommendations need to address environmental issues; sustainable visitation; periodic closures of trails, parking lot, shuttles and enforce parking/traffic regulations; fee-based visitation (e.g. parking or gate fee); site marketing and cross-marketing and responsibilities for site management and operations.

Preliminary site concepts were also presented at the meeting, outlining options for where parking lots, walking trails, viewing platforms, boardwalks, interpretive information boards and wayfinding could be located on the property. The concepts ranged from limited access to the badlands to full access.

"We want to cultivate the wonderful resource we have in a reasonable and sustainable way that doesn't harm that resource or the community it's in," said Hugh Spencer of Museum Planning Partnership, who explained the interpretive goals of the master plan.

He added the aim is to educate the visitor on badlands cultural and geological history, natural environment, encourage shared stewardship of the Bruce Trail and assist in managing large groups of people in a natural setting in a safe, efficient manner.

The parking lots and trail entrances will provide an opportunity for wayfinding and the introduction of interpretive themes. The viewing areas could include a main viewing deck and interpretive installation, one viewing platform with distinct areas or a series of linked platforms where sections may be visited as stand-alone areas.

The property could also include tactile elements and design features such as texture boxes, which would allow people to experience the look and feel of the Queenston shale. Trail system markers can be designed to portray themes about the badlands and remind visitors of the need for sustainability and stewardship. They could also serve as trail wayfinding and information markers (e.g. distance).

A website and information on the badlands on social media was also recommended to target a broader audience. This would provide information for the general public as well as educators and tour groups.

Councillor Barb Shaughnessy said she was under the impression that the site would not be open until the master plan was approved and in place.

"The site will not be open until we can make it safe," Fraser reported. "Sometimes master plans take 20 years to implement . . . I'm going to be realistic. This is probably going to be a multi-phase process. It will not be open until the four objectives are met ? safety, parking-traffic plan, conservation of resource and accessibility. When is that going to happen? It's going to be a while to be

realistic.?

One local resident was curious as to what will happen to Olde Base Line. He pointed out it will cost millions of dollars to make it safe and appropriate for increased car and pedestrian traffic. Fraser responded anything that happens on the right of way is the Region of Peel's jurisdiction and a report addressing those issues is expected to go before Regional council soon.

Another man suggested there should be a fee to visit the property.

?You're building all this, you may as well make some money,? he said.

One resident suggested that the local businesses, which will profit from making this a tourist attraction, make a financial contribution to the project.

One woman said the discussion on the Cheltenham badlands has been going on for many years and so far there is no management plan, no goals have been put in place and there is no plan to reach those goals and no funding to put a plan in place. Furthermore, it is unclear what impact it will have on tourism or relate to businesses, she added.

?There are a whole lot of problems and a whole lot of things that need to be looked at and these things are millions of dollars,? she noted, adding people are stilling going there even though it's closed. Last Thanksgiving, there were almost 1,000 cars in the area.

?We need to have a whole master plan in place before we open anything.?

Another local community forum to collect input for the badlands master plan is scheduled for June 21 at the Inglewood Community Centre.