

THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

Oakville development threatens to split town

Feb 26 2002

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The Hamilton Spectator

Almost 600 people squeezed into a stuffy council chamber and three overflow rooms to listen to arguments over a proposal that would increase the population of Oakville by 55,000. While development won't take place for decades, and is still in the early proposal stages, people speaking before council last night had concrete and specific arguments for and against building on the last substantial chunk of greenspace in Oakville.

More than 50 people lined up to address town council before it debates and decides whether to go ahead with a revised official plan amendment.

The plan has already been before an 11-member stakeholders committee that has made its own recommendations to staff.

The land in question covers 3,000 hectares of countryside from north of Highway 5, up to Highway 407 and in between the Ninth Line and Bronte Creek.

The residents' group that represents those who already live in the sparsely developed area has resigned itself to the fact that development will happen, Michael Telawski told councillors.

But he said changes made by the stakeholders' group and approved by two staff are a step in the right direction.

"I still can't commit that they are all entirely happy," he said. "It is these residents who will feel the impact of changes firsthand, and their way of life will change."

The town has applications from four developers for amendments to its official plan to allow new building. Although there is no definitive proposals to build houses, businesses and industries in the town's north end, there is agreement that what is at stake will add 55,000 residents and 35,000 workers to the town. That represents an increase of almost 50 per cent in the number of people who live in the town were Oakville to continue growing without any more development on the environmentally sensitive northern sections.

The grassroots community group Oakvillegreen wants to stop development outright following the success of preserving the Oak Ridges Moraine, north of Toronto.

The Trafalgar Moraine which forms part of Oakville's undeveloped land is the source of six streams and rivers and contains many woodlots and wetlands.

"Why would you pave the Trafalgar Moraine when you save the Oak Ridges Moraine," asked Renee Sandelowsky.

"We are just asking for 20 per cent of Oakville."

Some of those speaking, and members of council, want to see environmentally sensitive areas such as the moraine, mapped out before the planning moves to its secondary stages.

But the plan calls for that to happen after studies are completed in the secondary planning stages.

"We don't know enough yet," said Sandelowsky. "We want the greenspace because people need it."

The issue for people in Oakville, Burlington and Hamilton is the impact of adding thousands of homes, people and businesses and the huge jump in traffic that will tax the infrastructure and the environment.

If council approves the plan amendment, any appeals could go before the Ontario Municipal Board, which can approve, amend or reject all or portions of the plan.

The Oakville residents' battle is not unlike that fought by Toronto residents who wanted the Oak Ridges Moraine protected from development.

The Ontario government came to their rescue after pressure and lobbying to outlaw development on the environmentally sensitive moraine.

The end result was to earmark at least \$15 million into its preservation in a land-swap.

Legislation tabled at Queen's Park would protect 100 per cent of the natural and water resources on the moraine, preserve agricultural land and focus development in approved settlement areas, promised Municipal Affairs Minister Chris Hodgson.

"Even there, any new development would be subject to very strict policies to protect natural features and water resources," Hodgson told the legislature in early November.

"Almost all new development would be limited to the settlement areas, which constitute just 8 per cent of the land area of the moraine."

Under the land-swap, five development consortiums with plans to build 8,000 homes on about 1,000 hectares of undeveloped moraine land in Richmond Hill will turn most of the property over to public ownership.

In return, the landowners will be given property of equal development value in the provincially owned future town of Seaton in Pickering.

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