

Head & Gail.

Pushing back against proposal near Kimberley in many ways

(by M.T. Fernandes, Local Journalism Initiative)

A proposal to put housing and commercial development near Kimberley is part of a much larger picture for the president of the Escarpment Corridor Alliance.

Talisman is a microcosm, Bruce Harbinson said in an interview last week, reflecting an "intense interest in finding ways to develop in the Escarpment".

WHY FOCUS ON GREY HIGHLANDS COUNCIL

A defence of the Beaver Valley and the Niagara Escarpment is being pursued by many groups on many levels.

The Alliance held its own meeting locally in May, and also encouraged people to go ask questions at a regular "meet the people" municipal 'town hall' event held recently.

The Alliance is rallying people who oppose the proposal for about 370 units at Lower Talisman to make their views known to members of the local council.

In addition to the presence at the recent meeting, there is also a postcard campaign underway, aimed at councillors.

The June 11 Grey County public meeting on the Beaver Valley Development Group proposal will be held jointly with Grey Highlands, but it's Grey County council that is the decision-maker on the file.

The Advance asked why so much attention is being given to flooding local councillors with feedback and comments.

Mr. Harbinson said that in practice, county councillors often respect the opinion of the lower-tier involved, and vote accordingly. And so, the efforts to point

out the shortfalls of the plan to local council and make them feel the weight of public opinion. Mr. Harbinson said that those opposing the plan are "cautiously optimistic" they're being heard.

He added, though, that not all members of council think opposition is equally strong across the municipality.

COSTS & EFFECTS

The Alliance questions what future costs will fall to local taxpayers for water and wastewater servicing, and even whether it's possible to do the servicing of so many units without effects on water and wetland.

Similar questions about costs and environmental effects are being posed about local road and bridge work that will be needed.

These concerns have been raised by members at previous municipal meetings, including public meetings on development charges and the master servicing plan.

The Alliance is having many of the environmental and engineering studies submitted by the developers reviewed.

That includes matters like the water table and the wetland and the effect on the Beaver River and how setbacks around different natural features are used in the application.

"We want to remove some of the emotion out of this," Mr. Harbinger said. "We want to move forward on a fact-basis, on a science-basis."

The Escarpment Corridor Alliance gets its name from its vision of putting a protected ecological corridor in place across the region. That's the positive goal

continued on page 12

Kimberley

continued from page 1

of the group.

The corridor is important to connect and control people's access to the natural areas. The Bruce Trail would be one component.

Mr. Harbinger says that putting intense development will affect the view from Old Baldy, one of the iconic parts of the Escarpment.

UNKNOWNNS

Mr. Harbinger stressed that the plan submitted to the county only identifies blocks and the type of use. The final number of residential units may be different than the estimate of 370 in multi-unit buildings.

"The awareness of exactly what is happening is still inadequate," he said.

The Alliance is encouraging people to speak at the June 11 public meeting. There will be a limit of five minutes per person, accompanied by the ability to submit comments in writing.

"If it seems like we're pushing hard - it's because the stakes are so high, and the urgency is absolute," Mr. Harbinson said.

"There will be no more public input after this."

The permission to develop he said is "something that once it's done, it can't go back".

PROVINCIAL LEVEL

The ECA is also advocating for change by the Niagara Escarpment Plan

and the Ministry of Natural Resources.

The Recreation designation of the area in the Niagara Escarpment plan reflects a use that is no longer there, he said, the former Talisman ski hill - a use not likely to come back.

So the group has asked planners and lawyers to create a draft Niagara Escarpment Plan amendment. It could include for example, that permissions in place lapse if not used after a period of time.

That would be a way of addressing the permissions now in place, that also have been reflected in local municipal plans.

The Alliance sees that avenue promising because it would address any Recreation designation, including the Castle Glen proposal in Blue Mountains.

"It's good, because once and for all, we're going to get to the bottom of things," Mr. Harbinson said.

The concern would be reviewed by Commission staff first, then it would go to the Commission for a vote. If it succeeds there, it would go to the MNR and then to Cabinet.

"This isn't an issue that the current government is making - it's one they could solve with the stroke of a pen," he said.

The ECA absorbed the former Protecting Lands Alliance. There are several other groups and foundations that have stated their opposition to the proposed development.