

Subdivision proposal inches forward

Council discusses subdivision proposal, skateboard park, electronic devices, beavers causing flooding

Owen Sound Sun Times

October 18, 2013

By Rob Gowan

Proponents of a proposed residential development south of Wiarton are encouraged that, after two years of going nowhere, it may be able to soon to move forward.

South Bruce Peninsula council on Tuesday accepted a recommendation that an official plan amendment for the proposed development in Wiarton's industrial park be sent back to staff to reconsider the wording.

John Tennant, a planner with the Community Advocate in Owen Sound, who is representing the project's backers - they have not yet been publicly identified - asked for the move on Tuesday.

"I am optimistic that what we have accomplished today is an attempt to move forward," Tennant said. "We still have to resolve some concerns involving service infrastructure, but I think we are on the right road."

To proceed with the project, the property needs to be rezoned from industrial to residential and village core. Tennant suggested the amendment include wording that would require the developer to ensure town concerns about financing infrastructure work be satisfied.

"The municipality is concerned the ratepayers shouldn't be on the hook," he said. "Our position always has been that we agree."

The first phase of the project includes a maximum of 150 residential units, 1,000 square metres of commercial buildings and other associated uses. The plan for the entire project, located south of Elm St. on the west side of Highway 6, would see up to 1,500 residences with a village centre commercial district constructed over 20 years.

Mayor John Close said council wants to be reassured the ratepayers are not covering a lot of the costs involved in servicing the venture.

"Right now we have to figure out if we have general capacity in our water system, do we have capacity in our sewage system to pick up a subdivision of this size?" Close said. "If we go forward with the OPA 30 (official plan amendment) and do an EA (environmental assessment), who is going to pick up those costs and, at the end of the day, are we going to have an empty subdivision because the costs have gone out of hand?"

Close said he is hopeful the project proceeds.

"Since amalgamation we haven't had a subdivision go ahead in South Bruce Peninsula," said Close. "Rural communities are really struggling with keeping their population and keeping growth occurring and we have to look at this as a growth area for us."

The town is continuing efforts to have government grants for the now cancelled Sauble sewer project redesignated for upgrades to the Wiarton system. The upgrades would add enough capacity for the project to proceed.

Michael Humble, the town's manager of financial services, said Tuesday the town is still in talks with upper tier governments about having the grants transferred. The municipality hasn't been told when a decision will be made.

SKATEBOARD PARK

Council has asked staff to provide a report on a suitable location for a skateboard park.

Nick Thorn and Austin Cutting, members of a committee that wants to build a skateboard park in Wiarton, on Tuesday showed council their plans for the facility.

"I have been skateboarding, biking and scootering for almost four years now and I just want a place to not get in trouble and a little bit safer place to hang with my friends too," Thorn said.

The group has pegged the cost of project at about \$300,000 and they plan to hold fundraisers and approach local businesses and service groups to raise the money. The local Rotary and Optimist clubs, the IODE and Propeller Club are already on board.

"The cement pad is the biggest thing right now," said Thorn. "We need a place for it to go and then we can build onto that."

The group asked council to provide a location for the park. They outlined two possible areas as the Jimmy Brown Rotary Park at the corner of Frank St. and McNaughton St. and the Dan Davidson ball park on the western edge of Wiarton.

Coun. Janice Jackson suggested Bluewater Park on the waterfront as her ideal choice due to its central location, though there were some concerns about drainage in the area.

Cutting said he was open to any location, the group just wants to see a park built.

The group hopes to have the park operational in a year to a year and a half.

ELECTRONIC DEVICES

South Bruce Peninsula is to consider requiring members of the public to turn off electronic devices at council meetings.

For the second meeting in a row, council deferred third reading of its procedural bylaw because of changes concerning the use of electronics in the council chambers.

At its Oct. 1 meeting council directed staff to rewrite the bylaw to include a section banning recording devices from the council chambers. But Tuesday, Mayor John Close suggested council go a different route and require people to turn off electronic devices such as cellphones, digital recorders, laptops and cameras when entering the council chambers.

He suggested a notice be posted on the council doors advising the public of the requirement.

Close said members of council have received both verbal and written complaints from people concerned about being photographed while attending council meetings. Close also said electronics can be distracting when they go off during meetings.

Council instituted a ban on people recording open sessions of council in March 2011. Weeks later it rescinded the ban. Since then the town has made audio recordings of council meetings, which are posted on its website for two weeks.

BEAVERS CAUSE FLOODING

South Bruce Peninsula council says a problem with beavers, which have built a dam on private property that has flooded Chesley Lake homes, is out of their control.

Council on Tuesday asked staff to write the Grey Sauble Conservation Authority and the Ministry of Natural Resources asking them to do what they can to stop the flooding that is costing residents thousands of dollars and could potentially lead to decreased property assessment.

Public works manager Tom Gray explained Tuesday that town staff does not have the authority to work on private property and should not enter private property due to liability concerns. Nor does the town have the authority to monitor, control or alter the water levels of a lake, which falls under the jurisdiction of the GSCA and the MNR.

Earlier this summer concerned residents asked council for assistance in finding a permanent fix for beavers blocking the outflow from the lake. The animals keep damming a culvert under a laneway on private property. Town staff and residents have removed branches from plugged culverts, but the beavers quickly replace them, causing lake levels to rise and flood lakefront properties.

Mayor John Close said he was hopeful the Chesley Lake Cottage Association and the owner of the property the culvert is on could come to an agreement on how to stop the flooding.