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NEWS NORFOLK & REGION

Council weighs Hastings Drive options

By Monte Sonnenberg, Simcoe Reformer
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Hastings Drive at Long Point. (Simcoe Reformer file photo)

SIMCOE - Windham Coun. Jim Oliver signalled last month that he wants to send the county solicitor to the Ontario Municipal Board with a game plan for Hastings Drive in Long Point.

Simcoe Coun. Peter Black has responded with an attempt to bind the county in advance to provincial policy regarding hazard land uses.

That policy states that dynamic, hazard-land areas are off-limits to new development and initiatives that encourage increased human activity.

Cottage owners on Hastings Drive have appealed a county plan to allow increased recreational activity to the OMB. This includes camping and the parking of recreational vehicles on private lots.

When the OMB agreed to hear the matter, Norfolk council directed its legal team to get the best deal possible for the county.

Norfolk council didn't know at the time that the OMB would grant standing to owners of vacant lots on Hastings. In light of this, Oliver wants to recall Norfolk's legal counsel and provide objectives for when the hearing resumes.

Coun. Oliver has tabled a motion to this effect. It will be aired at the Nov. 14 meeting of council.

For his part, Coun. Black has tabled a motion that will also be considered at next week's meeting.

Black's motion is based on a letter from senior provincial officials, one expressing concern with the permits the Long Point Region Conservation Authority has granted in recent months for intensified uses on Hastings Drive.

Black's motion is also based on a recent Ontario Court of Appeal decision. That ruling affirmed the obligation of conservation authorities to adhere to provincial land-use policies in their decision-making.

The letter from the province is dated Oct. 23 and is addressed to LPRCA general manager Cliff Evanitski. It is signed by Scott Oliver the Ministry of Municipal Affairs' manager of community planning, and Mitch Wilson, district manager of the Ministry of Natural Resources.

"It is well known that the lands in the Hastings Drive area are subject to a number of natural hazards including flooding, erosion and wave uprush," Oliver and Wilson say.

"In addition, this area contains provincially significant wetlands, is an area of natural and scientific interest, and contains federal and provincial species-at-risk habitat. These matters and corresponding restrictions on development are dealt with in the Provincial Policy Statement and the county official plan.

"The Planning Act requires decisions by various bodies – including conservation authorities – to be consistent with the Provincial Policy Statement."

Port Rowan Coun. Noel Haydt, chair of the LPRCA, told council he was surprised to see the province's letter attached to Black's motion. Haydt said he thought the letter was sent to the LPRCA as private and confidential correspondence.

Black rejected the suggestion. He noted that the letter was forwarded to Norfolk County. Black said there was no suggestion it was confidential and as such was fair game for public consumption.

Scott Oliver and Wilson have offered to meet with the LPRCA to discuss their concerns further.

It remains to be seen whether Norfolk council will have next week's discussion in open session or behind closed doors. In his motion Coun. Jim Oliver says this should be "at the discretion of the county clerk (Andy Grozelle)."

Council is racing to meet a Nov. 21 deadline. That is the date the OMB has set for all parties to share the reference material that will be weighed when the Hastings Drive hearing resumes.

Dozens of cottages on Hastings Drive were damaged or washed away during a severe storm in December of 1985. The storm occurred at a time of record-high water levels on Lake Erie.

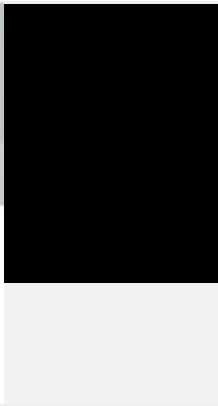
The former Haldimand-Norfolk Region responded by declaring the resort area hazard land. This prevented cottage owners from replacing their structures. The few cottages on Hastings that survived the storm have been grandfathered as active properties.

Owners of vacant lots have been clamouring in recent years for the right to use their land for recreational purposes. Norfolk County owns about 50 vacant lots in the area in question. Some on council are sympathetic to intensified activity, given that there hasn't been a catastrophic storm along the north shore of Lake Erie in over 30 years.

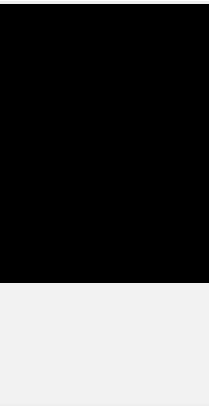
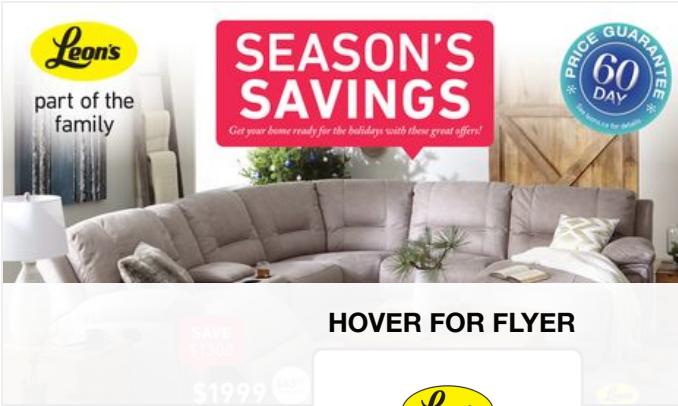
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