



NEWS NORFOLK & REGION

Long Point land deal questioned



By Monte Sonnenberg, Simcoe Reformer
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Some in Long Point were surprised to learn last fall that Norfolk County is prepared to sell this 4,924-square-foot piece of land on Beach Avenue to an adjoining cottage owner for \$5,000. Critics say the land is worth far more than that. (Contributed Photo)

Questions are being raised now that Norfolk County is preparing to sell part of an unopened road allowance in Long Point for \$5,000.

The square piece of property measures 4,924 square feet. It is located at the end of Beach Avenue at the intersection of Sandy Lane.

In November, Norfolk council agreed to sell the property to Barry Sullivan, owner of an adjoining cottage at 1 Sandy Lane. As part of the process, council will host a public meeting at Governor Simcoe Square next week to hear from nearby property owners who may be affected by the transaction.

It was suggested this week that the process the county followed in this case is not in the best interests of Norfolk taxpayers. Scott Sumner, a former Bay Street lawyer living in Australia, is familiar with the situation because his family owns the property at 3 Sandy Lane.

In a submission to the county, Sumner said a new cottage could be built on the land in question. As such, Sumner says the land is worth far more than the \$5,000 Norfolk settled for.

"It will be critical for all taxpayers and for this council to ensure that the price paid (for) this land is fair market value," Sumner said. "To do otherwise would be to rob taxpayers of their collective assets and money and to expose the council to allegations of improper disposal of county assets."

Sumner argues that the land is worth more than \$100,000. Sumner says land like this should be subject to a public auction to ensure taxpayers get full value for the asset. Were there an auction, Sumner said his family would be interested in bidding.

Long Point resident Stu Ross, a director of the Long Point Ratepayers Association, says there is historic support in the resort community for Sumner's position. Ross – who spoke Friday as an involved resident of Long Point and not on behalf of LPRA – says vacant lot value in Long Point are well-established.

As a rule, a vacant building lot in Long Point fronting onto Lake Erie is worth about \$500,000. Ross said a vacant lot fronting onto a channel is worth about \$300,000. A building lot with no waterfront exposure is worth about \$200,000.

"Norfolk County taxpayers might not have their best interests served by selling it for such a ridiculously low amount of money," Ross said. "Surely this should be done at fair market value. This raises questions about the county's methodology for disposing of vacant land. May allowances should be made for a bidding process like we have for selling lands that are in arrears. You want to get the best possible price. The process should be done to the benefit of the taxpayer."

In her report to Norfolk council last fall, Lydia Harrison, Norfolk's property management co-ordinator, said the price the county puts on road allowances, lanes and alleyways corresponds to what Norfolk is prepared to pay for land to establish new roads or widen existing roads. The county's rule of thumb in such instances is \$5,000 per acre.

Friday, Port Rowan-area Coun. Noel Haydt said Norfolk's formula for pricing surplus property is outdated and inadequate. Basic farmland, he said, is selling for \$10,000 an acre or more.

Haydt is not inclined to delay the sale based on the complaints he has heard. He said Sullivan has established buildings on the land in question and has an encroachment agreement with the county due to the fact that his cottage is partially on the road allowance.

"I see this as a house-keeping issue," Haydt said. "I'd hate to see this go to auction and open up a can of worms."

Attempts to contact Barry Sullivan were unsuccessful.

Norfolk council will field input from the community at its regular meeting Tuesday at Governor Simcoe Square. The meeting begins at 5 p.m.

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