

"I'm a firm believer in property rights," said Waterford Coun. Harold Sonnenberg. "You should be able to do with your property what reasonable. There are already cottage owners on Hastings Drive. The other property owners should be able to enjoy the same privilege. I cannot base land-use policy on a storm that happened 31 years ago."

That storm in December of 1985 wiped out dozens of cottages in Long Point and elsewhere along the Lake Erie shoreline. The storm occurred at a time of record high water levels on Lake Erie.

The former Haldimand-Norfolk Region responded by imposing a hazard land designation on Hastings Drive. The zoning change prevented affected property owners from rebuilding their cottages.

Property owners on Hastings whose cottages survived were allowed to stay. They retain the right to rebuild their cottages if they burn or fall derelict. Last year, council decided the threat on Hastings had passed and that the neighbourhood should be allowed to redevelop.

The future of Hastings occupied five hours of council's time Tuesday night. Many speakers asked why Hastings is off-limits to redevelopment when people have been allowed to rebuild in other disaster zones.

Mary Weber, owner of two cottages and two vacant lots in Long Point, was a member of council's technical advisory committee on Hastings Drive. In her presentation Tuesday, Weber noted that tornadoes have killed 30 people and injured 810 in Ontario since 1979.

"Not one of these affected communities was immediately declared hazard land and a moratorium on rebuilding put in place," Weber said. "In fact, most of these communities were given emergency disaster funds to rebuild. We had such devastating tornadoes sweep through Waterford. Did we tear down these people's homes and tell them they couldn't rebuild because another tornado just might come through again someday? You have to think of people's safety you know."

Other speakers referred to the wildfire that tore through Fort McMurray in northern Alberta last week and the fact that no one has suggested a permanent evacuation of the town.

Some on council want to maintain the status quo on Hastings due to environmental concerns. Hastings Drive is located next to the Big Creek Marsh and is part of a UNESCO world biosphere reserve. The Ministry of Natural Resources has identified Hastings as home to a number of species-at-risk.



"I'm speaking for all the people who understand the damage that can be done to an environmentally-sensitive place like Hastings if we allow it to develop," said Simcoe Coun. Peter Black. "I for one believe Long Point and Turkey Point should never have been allowed to develop. I don't know why we ignore the history of storms in these areas."

"If we continue to build in these environmentally sensitive areas, we will no longer have an environment."

Planning staff told council it will have to go through the public notification process if it wants to change the zoning on Hastings to allow new construction, camping and RVs. An official plan amendment would be required as well, as would an environmental impact study.

"Either way, this thing is going to the Ontario Municipal Board and the Ontario government is going to make the decision," said Delton Coun. Mike Columbus, chair of the Long Point Region Conservation Authority.

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