

Another blow for Hastings Drive property owners



By Monte Sonnenberg

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Property owners who want to re-open Hastings Drive to recreational uses suffered another blow recently when Norfolk's Environmental Advisory Committee refused to weigh in on their proposal.

Norfolk council referred the idea to NEAC May 7. The committee considered the proposal June 10 but concluded it did not have enough information for an informed opinion.

"As there is not sufficient information to prove no negative impact on the natural features or their ecological functions, and as NEAC's mandate is to have adequate information that natural heritage is protected, NEAC therefore recommends a comprehensive Environmental Impact Study be

completed for the Hastings Drive area before council makes a decision," the committee ruled in a motion tabled by Dr. Harold Schroeter of Simcoe.

NEAC's finding stacks the odds against Norfolk council approving more liberal uses for Hastings Drive in its new zoning bylaw. The item is on the agenda of this week's council meeting, which will be held Tuesday night.

In light of NEAC's decision, Jim McIntosh, the county's manager of community planning, recommends that council deny the Hastings Drive proposal and move on.

"In the case of a proposal for such a significant change to land use policy and regulation, staff would suggest that the appropriate approach would be an application to amend both the official plan and zoning bylaw accompanied with supporting justification, including an environmental impact study," McIntosh says in his report to council.

Hastings Drive was densely populated with cottages until a severe winter storm in 1985 wiped many off their foundations. Lake Erie was experiencing record high water levels at the time. Dozens of lots were vacated and affixed with a hazard land zoning.

Late last year, a group of property owners approached council with the idea of allowing them to put recreational trailers and tents on their land for camping purposes.

Council has since heard numerous objections to the idea. There are concerns about renewed recreational activity in an area that is home to species-at-risk and which abuts a provincially-significant wetland. There are also concerns that people using Hastings Drive in this manner could be putting themselves at risk in the event of severe weather.

In a presentation to council last week, Hastings Drive cottager Ellen Boyce said the county has no choice but to turn down the request now that NEAC is unwilling to venture an opinion.

"NEAC was asked to comment by council and specifically stated that they are not qualified to give an opinion and that this proposal requires a detailed, comprehensive environmental impact study," Boyce said. "If they aren't qualified and the Long Point Region Conservation Authority isn't and the Ministry of Natural Resources is concerned, then council is

also not qualified on its own to make a change in the hazard land zoning or amend it for site-specific uses.”

The Hastings Drive applicants are represented by Delhi planning consultant David Roe. Roe has told council that Hastings Drive can handle casual recreational uses without impacting on the ecosystem.

Three deputations are scheduled to speak further to the issue at Tuesday’s meeting, which gets underway at Governor Simcoe Square at 5 p.m. Council is expected to render a decision once they are finished.

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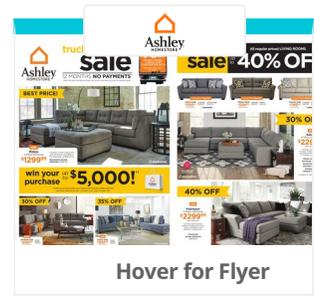
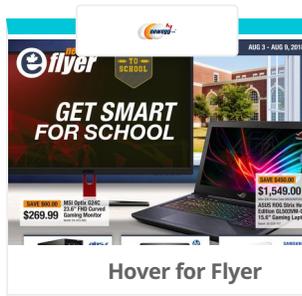
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