

Koffler enters new phase of development

By Mark Pavilons

One of King's precious natural reserves is evolving.

The Koffler Scientific Reserve, owned by the University of Toronto, is growing to meet demands. King council recently approved a zoning amendment, giving the facility the green light to move ahead with its expansion plans.

The zoning change will allow education, research and overnight accommodation on the property, which is a popular spot for conservation research. The change also allows for a maximum number of five dwellings on the property.

Operators of the 487-acre parcel at Jokers Hill plan to build a new main building of 13,990 square feet. It would accommodate various preservation and conservation projects, as well as teaching and meeting space. It will also provide accommodation for employees, visiting faculty and students. There are plans for 20 small, three-season cabins equipped with electricity only.

The property is located within the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan Area and it's a valuable resource in the GTA. The ORMCP allows development and site alteration for conservation projects.

While the proposed construction would be considered major development, the applicants have conformed to all setbacks and guidelines.

King's Committee of Adjustment, in 2017, approved a variance to allow for the use, conversion and refurbishment of a former race barn on the property.

Township staff supported the plans and will continue to work with the applicant through the site plan application process to pinpoint the locations of the proposed development.

The facility will be serviced with treated well water from the existing on-site water treatment system. A new septic and waste management system will also be installed.

John Stinchcombe, director at Koffler, told councillors they've been working closely with Township staff and are mindful of all the setbacks and requirements.

"We've hit on a plan that upholds conservation plans and allows us to meet our education goals," he said.

Councillor Debbie Schaefer called the project "great," noting it will grow and still safeguard our key natural features.

Councillor Avia Eek is "thrilled" the project is moving forward. "It's so beneficial from a scientific perspective," she said, praising Township staff and the team at Koffler.