

Township staff recommends refusing banquet hall bid

By Angela Gismondi

A proposal for an outdoor banquet facility and a children's camp on Oak Ridges Moraine lands in King will be on the agenda for the first meeting of council following summer hiatus.

The contentious issue will be discussed at the committee of the whole meeting on Aug. 26. The staff report was released Monday, giving interested parties a preview of what Township's planners will be recommending to council.

The official plan amendment and zoning bylaw amendment applications submitted by Peter Eliopoulos concern a 49-hectare (121-acre) parcel of land located in the Oak Ridges Moraine at 3550 18th Sideroad. The property is located on the west side of Highway 400 between the 18th Sideroad and Lloydtown-Aurora Road.

The applicant filed an appeal to the Ontario Municipal Board in February on the basis that the Township failed to make a decision on the applications within 180 days. The purpose of the report is to help council determine its position for the OMB hearing. According to the report, staff is recommending that the Official Plan Amendment application submitted by Eliopoulos, to re-designate the lands from Prime Agriculture to Rural, be approved by the Ontario Municipal Board. However, planning staff is also recommending council take the position that the zoning bylaw amendment application submitted to re-zone the lands from Oak Ridges Moraine Countryside (ORMC) to Oak Ridges Moraine Countryside (ORMC) exception to permit a children's camp, not be approved by the OMB.

Furthermore, staff is recommending the applicant's request to rezone the lands from Oak Ridges Moraine Countryside to Oak Ridges Moraine Countryside Exception to permit a wedding garden banquet facility, be refused by the OMB.

The applicant was informed the proposal would require an official plan amendment to redesignate the lands to allow consideration of major recreational uses within the Oak Ridges Moraine Countryside land use designation.

The applicant submitted the revised application to the Township in March 2011. The outdoor banquet facility would include three garden areas for the purposes of holding wedding events with each garden having a hosting capacity of 200 persons (600 person total) together with three designated parking areas planned to accommodate a total of 440 vehicles. Reception areas would be supported by tents and a total of 60 staff. The development also includes a new caretaker dwelling measuring approximately 900 square metres with provision for it to be used as a bed and breakfast establishment. The applications further propose to establish a children's camp for a maximum capacity of 400 users and includes the construction of a mess hall (about 500 square metres) and an activity building (about 700 square metres). Playing fields are also shown on the concept site plan for the lands.

Sustainable energy features are also identified in the proposal including geothermal heating, solar panels, wind energy features and a greenhouse. Lastly, the Applicant proposes to create a historical village whereby historical buildings from the King-Vaughan area would be relocated on the lands for re-use.

The redesignation of the lands would allow a recreational use on the property but after an evaluation of the Oak Ridges Moraine Conformity Plan and the Provincial Policy Statement, staff is of the opinion that the wedding garden/banquet facility is not a recreational use, but rather a commercial use.

Planning staff is of the view that the children's camp, as a serviced campground, falls within the definition of recreational use and falls within the provisions for major recreational use, however, it also constitutes major development.

Planning staff has identified significant concerns with the applications relating to conformity to provincial, regional and local land use policies with respect to the wedding garden/banquet facility, reads the staff report. The fundamental issue from a land use policy standpoint is whether the wedding garden/banquet facility use is a recreational use ... Planning staff is of the opinion that the banquet use is not a recreational use but a commercial use. As such, this component of the application for rezoning is not supportable from a land use policy perspective and presents significant technical and land use compatibility issues. As such, the proposal does not represent good planning.

Township staff is recommending that the Township solicitor and staff be authorized to prepare for and attend the OMB hearing in support of council's position.

Planning staff is also recommending that council direct that a further report regarding the children's camp component of the applications come back to council if the outstanding matters set out in the report relating to hydrogeology matters and access are addressed by the applicant.