

It's food or floods say Ajax, environmental groups

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AJAX-PICKERING -- Whether to develop a swath of land in northeast Pickering boils down to a choice between food and floods, Ajax Mayor Steve Parish and allies from environmental groups say.

On June 2, Mayor Parish joined Sierra Club Ontario chapter director Dan McDermott in releasing a Sierra Club report supporting Ajax's stance that the headwaters of the Carruthers Creek in Pickering should not be developed.

The lands are north of Hwy. 7 and west of Lakeridge Road and are not part of the Greenbelt. The Region of Durham included the lands for development in its Growth Plan submission to the Province. The Carruthers Creek flows through Ajax and empties into Lake Ontario at the Carruthers Marsh.

At the news conference, held at the Carruthers Marsh pavilion in Ajax, Mayor Parish said the concern is that area of south Ajax will see more flooding if the headwaters of the creek are developed.

"Some of the housing to the west of me is already under flood designation."

Mayor Parish said the land in question, about 3,200 acres, is projected to house about 30,000 people, a town the size of



Sabrina Byrnes / Metroland

AJAX -- Pickering City Councillor Bonnie Littley, and Ajax Mayor Steve Parish addressed the issue of the Region's decision to designate the headwaters of Carruther's Creek in northeast Pickering as an 'urban area' during a news conference at the Carruther's Marsh Pavilion June 2. June 2, 2010

Orangeville. He said the area does not connect to either the current urban Pickering or the planned Seaton subdivision and should not be developed.

"It's a new settlement which is specifically prohibited in the Places to Grow Act," he said, adding that in a draft decision, the Province has recommended deleting the lands from Pickering's proposed urban area.

Pickering councillor Bonnie Littley said she intended to ask Pickering council to withdraw its support of the urbanization of the lands.

When asked by a member of the audience who was behind designating the lands, Coun. Littley didn't name names, but Mayor Parish did, calling out Pickering Mayor Dave Ryan.

"Mayor Ryan was very much behind this and to the best of my knowledge still supports this," he said, adding Regional Chairman Roger Anderson also strongly supported the development.

Neither Mayor Ryan's office nor Regional representatives returned calls for comment on the press conference and they were not present at the event.

The Sierra Club report emphasized the connection between urbanization and flooding in other areas of Ontario. When land is paved over, rainfall cannot be absorbed and it travels over land into the creeks which see a much larger flow rate, possibly causing flooding in downstream areas. Mr. McDermott said the water also picks up pollutants from the paved surfaces and cited Frenchman's Bay in Pickering as a worst-case scenario. Runoff from Hwy. 401 and urban Pickering has rendered the water in Frenchman's Bay too salty to support the ecosystem it once did.

"When you pave it over, you increase the possibility of flooding as well as the drainage of pollutants," said Mr. McDermott.

Rick Smith, of the Ontario Greenbelt Alliance and Environmental Defence, said councils in other parts of the GTA were passing motions to protect their remaining green spaces and there wouldn't be a second opportunity to get things right.

"We're not going to be able to unpave these areas we've paved over," he said.

Mayor Parish said nobody is in favour of the development except for Regional council and developers who bought up the acres of land on speculation.

YouTube links for the press conference are online at townofajax.com.