

Whitevale residents fight for Pickering hamlet

Residents speak out against latest Seaton plans

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PICKERING -- Whitevale residents aren't willing to give up their quiet, quaint community without a fight.

The small hamlet on Concession Road 5, nestled just east of Altona Road, is also set to neighbour the future Seaton development. Seaton is a provincial development that's expected to attract 70,000 people and 35,000 jobs and will include schools, neighbourhood parks and mixed-use buildings.

A group of Whitevale residents attended the April 26 special council meeting in an attempt to keep the development from sprawling into the village.

After lengthy discussions and Ontario Municipal Board hearings, the City, the Province, the Seaton landowners and the Toronto and Region Conservation came up with the latest plans. By May 1, council was required to endorse the neighbourhood plans for Seaton or, according to Pickering staff, the item would most likely be challenged at the Ontario Municipal Board. City planners said this challenge could result in the Province going back to the initial plans, ones the City didn't favour.

"From my perspective I certainly wouldn't want to go back to the initial plans," said planning and development director Neil Carroll.

Lloyd Thomas, president of the Whitevale and District Residents Association, listed a number of concerns with the latest plans that include elementary schools and neighbourhood parks in the buffer area, an expanded bridge on Whitevale Road, and a sewer system that will service Seaton but not Whitevale.

Mr. Thomas was concerned to learn the bypass that's meant to divert traffic around the village is set to go up after construction starts.

"We need the bypass before the construction starts," he said. "You have to look at everything together."

Residents fear if the bypass goes in after construction begins, drivers will get used to travelling through the quiet village instead of bypassing it.

Mr. Thomas and the other residents shared a common concern: development encroaching the buffer area. They felt schools and neighbourhood parks set to be built in the buffer area will take away from its natural significance.

"Parks with ... swings and cement just doesn't seem to cut it," Mr. Thomas said.

Resident Mark Lowe expressed similar concerns.

"We're not standing here saying we don't want development, but when looking outside from in the hamlet, we don't want to see sprawl," he said.

Mr. Lowe moved into Whitevale in 2005 and knew of the plans for Seaton, but said the neighbourhood is a complete turnaround from original ideas.

"There has been a 180-degree shift in the thought of what that buffer should be used for," he said.

Other concerns included plans for the "monster bridge" planned to cross Duffins Creek, which has been damaged and deteriorating over the years and needs to be replaced.

"It's way bigger than what this town really needs," Marion Thomas said.

Pickering chief administrative officer Tony Prevedel said the bridge is currently undergoing an environmental assessment and is envisioned as a two-lane bridge with a sidewalk on both sides.

The City's consultants assured they've fought for what the City and residents have shown concern over. And council agreed the City should continue the fight and supported amendments presented by Ward 3 City Councillor David Pickles.

Council accepted the plans in a four-to-three vote to keep them from the OMB, but stipulated that Whitevale should be given the opportunity to hook up to the sanitary sewers if residents choose, bypass construction be included in phase one of development and to let the Province know current buffer uses are inappropriate.