

Jan 25, 1990

Shame on Belmont for what it's done

The village's freeze on development has left people out in the cold.

The decision stinks.

Belmont council's incomprehensible move to halt all development activities in the village has taken bureaucratic desecration of electors to the zenith.

Council should be embarrassed and ashamed of hanging residents out to dry.

If a public meeting held Monday is any indication of what feelings are really like, the Elgin County village is being torn apart by accusations of conflicts of interest and favoritism.

One councillor has resigned, calling the freeze "too drastic an action."

TWO-YEAR FREEZE?: Here's the short version of the affair. On Jan. 9, village council voted to halt all development, including every type of building and renovation from pools to houses to virtually anything that's constructed. The reason, residents are told, is that water, sewer and roads are nearly at capacity and can't sustain much more. The freeze could last from 18 to 24 months.

That freeze has left several people out in the cold. The development it most affects is Craighome Estates, a 165-lot subdivision to be developed by Joe Snyders, a local developer. The subdivision had already received the draft proposal okay from the province after approval from Belmont in April, 1989.

The rub is that Belmont, on advice from the engineering firm of Andy Spriet Associates Consultants and Engineers, is looking at increasing development charges from \$1,000 to \$5,000 a lot. That includes the PUC levy.

Snyders feels such a large, immediate increase is "unjust and unfair. I'm willing to negotiate but they refused."

The freeze also involves five undeveloped lots in another 28-lot subdivision. Three of them are owned by Snyders, the other two are owned privately. Snyders bought seven of the lots from Helen Spriet, who subdivided the land initially.

SOUGHT OMB HELP: Snyders asked the Ontario Municipal Board to arbitrate. He was waiting for a response when the vil-

lage froze him out.

So while Snyders and Belmont battle, Dennis Burt is caught in the middle. Burt bought one of those lots from Snyders for around \$50,000 in October, 1989, taking out a mortgage on the speculation he would sell his house in London. Burt received an offer and was prepared to sign it Jan. 10. That morning he learned of the freeze. There would be no building permit for a new home. Burt waited before turning down the offer Tuesday.

He's left with a lot on which he can't build and a home he can't sell.

"When I was going to buy, the village told me I had water and sewer services and would have no problem getting a building permit," said Burt, who tried to introduce an amendment to the bylaw. "They tell me studies (on the services) are being done right away. But I'm told it would be two months before I heard anything. Even then there's no guarantee I could build."

He will appeal but he's fully aware if he's allowed to build, others, like Snyders, would have a strong case for building as well.



**MORRIS
DALLA
COSTA**

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GRATEFUL: Burt is thankful for the support he's had from the people of Belmont.

"They want me to build. They want Snyders to finish his subdivision."

Even if building permits were ap-

proved for all the lots in question, Snyders says, Belmont's water and sewer system would still be under full capacity.

Council blames runaway development for the problems. The real blame is council's lack of foresight. Are councillors not elected to foresee these problems? Do they not hire consultants and engineers to prevent this type of thing from happening long before it reaches the stage it has at Belmont?

If sewer and water capacity is indeed what's behind the freeze, the only fair solution is to implement the freeze after all the projects already in the works have been completed.

If that doesn't happen, it might not be out of the question for electors to put their own freeze on this council come next election.

Morris Dalla Costa's column appears Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday.