

CVC vows tax levy if Fallbrook given heritage designation

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Staff Writer

Under threat of being saddled with future taxes, Halton Hills council has deferred—yet again—ratification of its decision to place a heritage designation on Fallbrook Farm.

At last week's council meeting, Credit Valley Conservation (CVC) Chief Administrative Officer Rae Horst warned the agency would levy taxes against Halton Region to pay for any future costs associated with Fallbrook Farm—something council had been trying to avoid for the past two and half years.

In September 2007 the CVC, owners of the Fallbrook property, requested a Town permit to demolish the rapidly deteriorating empty house on 27 Sideroad, and return the land to its natural state. Fallbrook, according to the CVC, sits on 1,500 acres of significant natural heritage lands.

But a quickly-formed citizens' group, Friends of Fallbrook Farm (FFF), intervened, and in the following years has managed to convince Halton Hills council of the validity of placing a heritage designation on a portion of the property—the 27 Sideroad single vault bridge, the 19th century log cabin portion of the house and the mill site.

That designation decision made in December was expected to be formally ratified by council at its January meet-

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—Councillor Dave Kentner



ing. But CVC had something more to say.

Horst told council that the CVC board of directors confirmed any expenses related to Fallbrook, including staff time, would be a special levy to Halton Region. CVC can only levy the Region and not local council.

"The CVC is struggling to carry out its natural heritage mandate in the face of rampant development exacerbated by climate change. We have very limited funds and human resources and our instructions are to concentrate on natural heritage," said Horst. "We have "grandfathered" Belfountain and Limehouse (the lime kilns), and will continue to work and operate cultural features on those properties."

Horst said the CVC is not in the landlord business, but attempts to sever the property and hand it over to someone else has been thwarted by the Niagara Escarpment Commission (NEC). She said the NEC would only consider a severance if the Town of Halton Hills or the Ontario Heritage Trust (OHT) accepted

the transfer. Halton Hills council a year ago rejected this opportunity, and the OHT said they would not accept it unless money to look after it came with it.

Horst said Town CAO Dennis Perlin was working on an "elegant solution" to the problem—working with the NEC to find a public agency willing to take the property and then lease it to the Friends of Fallbrook Farm.

Horst said if the Town was successful, she would recommend severance of the house and driveway to her board of directors, and Halton Region would be levied only with the staff time and lawyers costs in preparing the transfer.

If the Town is unsuccessful, and the Town still goes ahead with designation of the property, the CVC would not appeal the designation to the Ontario Municipal Board but would levy Halton Region with costs. These would include any costs related to the designation, ongoing maintenance, studies, consultants or restoration.

Horst estimated those costs could

range between \$300,000 to \$500,000. She also told council the CVC has found material in the home dangerous to the children taking environmental programs at the Environmental Education Centre located in the front yard of the Fallbrook house. As well, the house's condition continues to deteriorate posing a hazard.

But in a phone call to *The Independent Free Press* the next day, Ward 3 Councillor Dave Kentner, the Town's representative to Heritage Halton Hills, disputed those figures. He said the cost would be minimal—"in the hundreds" and involved only securing the property until a "future generation" could undertake restoration. He did not believe FFF was capable of taking on the job.

"With designation, the Town is not imposing an obligation to restore the building," said Kentner, but added that as property owners, the CVC would be required to secure the house under the Town's property standards bylaw.

"Future generations will address Fallbrook," he said, "but not us at this time." ... and referring to the CVC, he added, "The Town is not in the business of burdening property owners with a demand to restore designated properties."

Council is now scheduled to address the question of designation, now with the wrinkle of the CVC threat, at Monday's (Feb. 22) meeting.

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