

Stagnant development in Acton 'disappointing'

By FRANCES NIBLOCK
The New Tanner

"Frustrating and a little disappointing." That's the general consensus among Acton politicians and Town planners about the lack of development in Acton.

There's been silence now for several years from three of the developers who were party to an Ontario Municipal Board hearing that paved the way for Acton to grow to 10,000, and the only housing that's been built is in the Dawkins subdivision off Commerce Crescent and Wallace Street. Phase one of that development calls for 60 units, 50 of them single-family and 10 semi-detached. There are also plans to build a second phase of that subdivision consisting of 31-single-family units.

"The lack of development is disappointing," said Town Manager of Development Review Glenn Wellings in a recent interview.

"There was such a push to get on with things at the OMB, and once the approvals were received everything went stagnant," he said.

Acton Councillor Norm Elliott said the Town met with the developers and regional staff about a year ago to see what could be done to spur development and suggested that another meeting should be held.

"The developers are still concerned about the cost of improvements to the Acton water treatment plant and

storm water management," Elliott explained on Monday.

"The Region was looking at ways to mitigate some of the cost of storm water management, but obviously not enough to spark any development, and we've got that major problem," Elliott said, adding that encouraging growth in Acton would be the

main thrust for the Acton councillors during this term of office.

Wellings said that there'd been some interest recently from Bayfield Homes, formerly Acto- 2, which plans to build 60 homes as an extension to Lasby Lane.

"They (Bayfield) are continuing to work on revisions

to the first engineering submissions and I don't really have any idea of the timing but he (developer Jerry Montemarano) said they would be interested in going forward this year," Wellings said. Repeated calls to Bayfield Homes went unanswered.

Wellings said that the

planning department had heard that the former Rinarin Developments-now Monmar Homes-is interested in proceeding with the first phase of its proposed development on land north of the new arena, backing onto Churchill Road and south of the high school. Monmar has 150 lots draft approved and phase one

is approximately half of those units.

The Town has not heard anything lately from Brookfield Homes -formerly Coscan- that has draft approval to build 200 housing units and a commercial plaza with a food store, south of Highway 7 and east of Churchill Road.

Recreation and Parks rates and fees to increase

Significant, but necessary. That's the bottom line of a report on rates and fee increases for recreation and parks programs approved by Town Council on Monday.

User fees and charges for recreation and parks programs and services are used to help staff operate within Council's revenue recovery guidelines for subsidies and profits.

Staff call this year's increases "significant," but also necessary as a first step to substantial changes in revenue recovery, part of a comprehensive rate review study which will be ready late this year. That review will lead to some consistency across the Town for determining all municipal rates and fees although the Town's acting Director of Recreation and Parks, Joy Thompson, said there would always be recreation program and services supported by the tax base.

"It's important, for instance, that children learn

water safety. Given our community it's a life skill and our opinion it's essential," Thompson said recently.

"We believe that opportunities for recreation should not be a middle-upper class service and we feel that everyone should have access and the rates and fees we charge and the subsidies allows us to do that."

Increases for aquatics programs - between 4 and 15 per cent - get special note in staff's report.

Last year the Town was responsible for 50 per cent of the pools' operating costs - this year that jumps to 75 per cent and next year 100 per cent of the costs to operate the two in-door pools that the Halton Board of education had been paying.

"That 50 per cent cost was \$112,000 and that affects a lot of kids' swimming lessons, so you have to balance. I don't know of any municipality in Ontario where the aquatics user fees offset the

cost to run the facility," Thompson said, noting the 15 per cent increase in the swimming lesson works out to 50 cents more for 10 lessons - or \$5.26. Without an increased target for pools subsidies this year, pool users faced an average 67 per cent increase in costs.

Thompson said that the Town recovers operating overhead through user fees for some programs, but additional revenue is also generated from rink board adver-

tising and concession sales.

"We look for other creative ways to cover the cost. We look for sponsorships and partnerships and we have advertising programs and all that helps to keep the cost as low as possible to the user groups," Thompson said.

Last year the Town recovered 97 per cent of arena operating costs and this year's target is to generate 100 per cent of the costs.

"What the Town actually subsidies is not really a bear-

ing on the rates, in most cases, but a bearing on the attendance of any particular program and it's popularity."

"Sometimes when you get a waiting list for a program you want to add another class and what determines whether you add a class is if you can recover those costs, because they wouldn't be budgeted for," Thompson explained.

The approved increases in rates and fees will put an additional \$67,387 into the Town's coffers this year.

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