

Process took 10 years

Anatomy of a development

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Staff Writer

If John Spina knew 10 years ago the hurdles he would face in getting a housing development built on a small piece of land in Georgetown, he likely would not have bothered even trying.

"With hindsight, we probably would have reconsidered the application," said Spina, who today is jubilant to finally see the 28 detached homes— known as Silver Creek Ridge— about to be built on the five acres located just off Hall Rd.

The approval process for the development has been a long, and at times rocky road.

It all started in 1997 when Spina's company, Georgetown Estates, filed an application for 62 town homes on the nearly five-acre block. He figured that within a year to 18 months they would be building homes on that property, particularly Spina said, because a portion of the land had residential zoning on it since the 1950s and the rest of it was designated residential. However, the property was land-locked.

"So access had to be assumed," said Spina. "We thought access would be an extension of Hall Rd."

But that idea was rejected by Halton Hills council at the time, which had to contend with a huge outcry from nearby residents who did not want to see that road extended.

"It was disconcerting, shocking," said Spina. "Planning approvals are never smooth, but it certainly was not what was expected."

So with Hall Rd. off the table, Spina said they decided the best way to get access to their property was by purchasing a home on

Fagan Dr. that backs onto the land, knocking it down, and putting in an access road through that lot.

It was no surprise that idea was not embraced by either Town council or the many residents of Fagan Dr., who were very vocal about their opposition to the plan.

Spina said he understood the residents' reactions and if he lived on Fagan Dr. he would not have liked the plan either.

"No one likes to be intruded on in their own space, but we were forced," said Spina. "As much as they had a right to enjoy their property, we also had a right to enjoy our property."

The Fagan Dr. plan was on the table for approximately three years, with residents becoming well organized and fighting it all the way.

In the meantime, Halton Region's proposed Norval Bypass that included the possible extension of Tenth Line joining up with Hall Rd. got thrown into the mix causing more public outcry in the area.

Finally in August 2002 Town council begrudgingly approved the extension of Hall Rd. to Spina's property, with the residents in that neighbourhood split into camps— Fagan Dr. residents vs. Hall Rd. residents.

"The best choice out of two nasty choices" is how Councillor Jane Fogal described the decision at that time. Councillor Bryan Lewis called it a "no-win political decision" that pitted two areas of town against each other.

A week later the Ontario Municipal Board, which Georgetown Estates had been before several times on the application since 1999, gave its stamp of approval to the agreement for the development reached between the Town and Georgetown Estates.

That agreement called for work to be



John Spina stands by the extension of Hall Rd. that was needed before his 28-home development could be built. The entire process took 10 years. Photo by Ted Brown

done in the Silver Creek Valley including restoration of erosion issues in the tributary, and of the slopes there, and for a Class Environmental Assessment (EA) which was required to extend the road.

Spina said that EA was done in 2002, then in 2003 a resident requested a bump up to the Minister of the Environment, causing more delays.

Due to conditions and contractor availability the work in the valley wasn't completed until last year— nine years after the application was made.

Town of Halton Hills Planning Director Bruce MacLean said the Spina application gave rise to a complexity of issues including the environment (in the ravine), land use compatibility, servicing, traffic, and a variety of concerns raised by the public.

He said in order to gain access to the property across the ravine, remediation works were required to address erosion and stormwater requirements.

"The issue for land use caused concern in the neighbourhood with respect to the character of the neighbourhood," said MacLean. "The public was concerned about what would be allowed on this property."

MacLean said the ravine and controversy

from land issues that upset the neighbourhood took a long time to deal with, but in light of their complexity, he doesn't consider the time period too long.

The third element he said that resulted in delay was servicing. At the time Halton Region was working to bring on line a new well, and approval couldn't be given until there was water capacity.

MacLean also said the developer proposed a "series of different development forms" for the property before the final development was decided on.

When asked if the project has been worth it, Spina said, "yes".

"If we had directed our efforts and money toward approval of 150 acres, we probably would have finished sooner than this four acres of land, and perhaps at less cost."

He stressed today that planning is both a political and community process.

Spina said the homes, on 30 and 40 ft. lots, are to be built by Medi-Terra Properties Corp. and will range from \$380,000-\$470,000.

The Medi-Terra sales office is located at the northeast corner of Hwy. 7 and Adamson St. in Norval. For more information visit www.mediterracorp.com/silver-creekridge/

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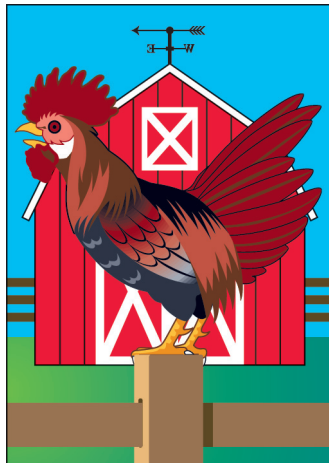
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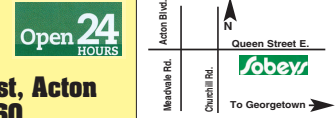


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