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Committee shoots down private school plan

LISA TALLYN
Staff Writer

Despite a staff recommendation to the contrary, Halton Region's Planning and Public Works Committee voted not to support a proposed private elementary school on the Eighth Line.

Halton Region Council is expected to vote on the issue today (Wednesday).

Last Wednesday the committee supported a motion by Halton Hills Mayor Rick Bonnette to not support the proposed use of lands for the Keswick Sutherland School and Equestrian Centre or approve a Regional Official Plan Amendment (OPA) that would allow for the school.

Region staff was recommending support for the proposed use of the lands and approval of the OPA.

Bonnette put forward the motion after the committee went in-camera for legal advice.

"It is not the recommended use in the Official Plan," said Bonnette. "I have concerns the greenbelt policy is somewhat being challenged."

He was also concerned about the logistics of a busing service, road safety and questioned how many of the students would be from Halton Hills.

Milton Councillor Barry Lee said he supported Bonnette's position, adding Eighth Line near the school wasn't much "more than a glorified cow path."

Oakville Councillor Tom Adams said he would "reluctantly" support the motion.

"I agree there appears to be significant issues with respect to traffic," said Adams.

Oakville Councillor Allan Elgar also said he would support the motion, but Burlington Councillor John Taylor, said "reluctantly" he wouldn't support it.

"I don't believe there is an Official Plan amendment (for the Town of Halton Hills plan) that is required," said Taylor.

Previously, Town planning staff had stated that a Town Official Plan amendment was not required, however, some Halton Hills councillors

disagreed. In March, Halton Hills council voted against the proposal for the private school despite a recommendation from Town planning staff that called the application "good planning" and a compatible rural use.

Taylor said, while he believed there were some concerns with the Eighth Line, the public and separate school boards currently have buses on the road so "it can't be completely hazardous."

"It's very seldom that a council goes against the advice of staff because you end up with not only your own staff being subpoenaed to speak against the council (at the Ontario Municipal Board) you also have to go out to hire (consultants) to testify against your own staff," said Taylor.

That becomes a "great financial burden" on the taxpayer, he said.

Jack Dennison, also of Burlington, said he would not support Bonnette's motion either.

Dennison said as a "private sector guy" he didn't agree with some of the assertions from the public that the school shouldn't be supported because it's a private business.

"We are a growth community," said Dennison. "We all have to accept a portion of that growth."

Before the committee members made their decision they heard from several area residents opposed to the school application.

Safety on the road from the increased traffic to and from the school was a key issue raised

"The biggest reason I'm against this is I fear for my life," said Eighth Line resident Lois Fraser. "I'm not being dramatic. We cannot safely get out of our driveways and this is going to be horrendous for us."

Glenn Wellings, the planner for Keswick Sutherland, called the application a "unique opportunity for both the Town and the Region."

"Obviously we're disappointed," said Wellings after committee made its decision. "We will be delegating before regional council."

A development permit from the Niagara Escarpment Commission is also required for the application.

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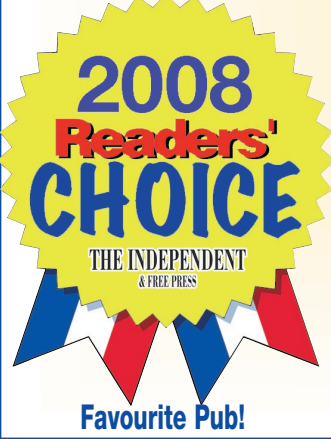
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