

Comment

The Canadian Champion

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Parked cars pose no threat to escarpment

Here we go again.

Country Heritage Park is once again in serious jeopardy, but this time will it be saved?

We must express our disappointment in the Niagara Escarpment Commission's (NEC) decision last week to turn down the park's application to allow cars from the Toronto Auto Auction to be stored on its property during the off-season.

Is the park's revenue-generating initiative really that much of an issue? In our opinion, it poses no threat to the Niagara Escarpment, however this decision seriously jeopardizes this rural treasure.

Country Heritage Park — the keeper of important agricultural history that's now largely run by volunteers after the Province several years ago decided it could no longer afford to operate it — should be helped, not hindered.

At the very least, the NEC should have given the park more time to find a way to make up for the revenue loss. That gesture would have at least shown some compassion for the park's situation.

We hope the park appeals the decision and that the NEC reserves its authority for a more pressing concern.

Our Readers Write

NEC's decision on car parking disappointing

(The following letter was addressed to Niagara Escarpment Commission manager Ken Whitbread, Country Heritage Park general manager Reg Cressman and Halton MPP Ted Chudleigh, and a copy was filed with The Champion.)

Dear Editor:

This letter is in response to Melanie Hennessey's articles about Niagara Escarpment Commission's decision to deny Country Heritage Park's application to allow cars awaiting sale at the Toronto Auto Auction to be parked on their property in the off season.

As I read these articles, I had the impression that an obscure and unnamed person complained to the NEC about using a designated park-

ing lot to park cars because it's not environmentally friendly.

Give full credit to general manager Reg Cressman and his staff at Country Heritage Park for finding innovative ways to raise funds to balance their budget.

The NEC staff and directors need to shake their collective heads. If you look 100 metres to the north of the park, we have Highway 401 — one of the worst environmental disasters ever to happen. Where was the NEC then?

And if you cross Hwy. 401 and go north about five kilometres, you see the continued rape of our biosphere by the various aggregate companies.

Perhaps the NEC is upset because it didn't get a share of the parking

revenue from Country Heritage Park.

All I can say to Mr. Cressman is keep up the good work. We've all benefited by visiting Country Heritage Park, as do our children and grandchildren.

To NEC manager Ken Whitbread, get your head out of the sand and see the light. Perhaps it's time for a change in the management of the NEC.

Looking around, we also see the removal of clay from the escarpment, tractor trailers across Tremaine Road and proposed residential development on Tremaine Road. And the NEC is concerned about parking a few cars.

John F. O'Drowsky
Campbellville

Commission should've made exception to its rules

Shame on the Niagara Escarpment Commission.

As most of you read in Tuesday's Champion, the commission turned down Country Heritage Park's application to allow thousands of cars awaiting sale at the Toronto Auto Auction to be stored on its property during the off-season.

While this may not sound like a big deal to some, it's actually an initiative the park has come to rely on for up to \$60,000 of crucial funding. And since it's a not-for-profit organization, one would know that every dollar counts.

The decision may very well have sealed the fate of the park, throwing it into financial turmoil just as the not-for-profit group that runs the facility is in the final stages of acquiring the property from the Province.

It's terrible an exception to the rules couldn't have been made for this organization that's trying

to do good for the community. The sad thing is, one commission member offered a reasonable solution to the problem, but it was never acted on.

Dave Baldwin suggested giving the park a year's grace, allowing the cars to be stored there this winter while it looks for other funding options.

This is something park general manager Reg Cressman even saw as an acceptable remedy. I think this could've appeased both parties, since the commission would still have had its way in the end and banned vehicle storage on the property after this winter.

The reality is, the park has been doing this since 1999 — what's one more winter?

Which brings me to my next point, why hasn't the commission acted on this matter until now?

While a public complaint thrust the parking issue into the spotlight, it's hard to believe that



The view from here

with MELANIE HENNESSEY

staff or at least one commission member hasn't driven by the park during winter over the past several years and spotted all of the vehicles.

One has to wonder if they simply turned a blind eye to the situation. I think it became more important to the commission to look good for that one person or handful of residents who have made it their business as to what goes on at the

park's property than to consider how its decision may lead to the ultimate closure of the beloved facility.

As Mr. Cressman indicated, the revenue from the auction cars is critical to the future of the park and without it the tourist destination could be turned back over to the Province, which reportedly isn't interested in operating it.

I know staff had its reasons for recommending denial, such as 'commercial' car parking not being viewed as compatible with the Niagara Escarpment Plan, but I think there are far worse things the park could've asked to do, like store garbage or hazardous waste.

I hope the park pursues an appeal of the decision, or is able to find another way to make up for the funding loss.

Like Mr. Cressman said, "We have a treasure here that we can't afford to lose."