

Mohawk plans move ahead

By Melanie Hennessey
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

Mohawk Racetrack's plans to build a golf course, hotel and conference centre on its expansive Guelph Line property took one step closer to reality this week.

The Town's administration and planning committee endorsed the \$72-million project at its meeting Monday night after hearing local residents' views on the development.

The Woodbine Entertainment Group, which owns Mohawk, intends to build an 18-hole, championship-style golf course and 10-storey, 216-room hotel that would include an informal dining room, fine dining restaurant, two lounges/bars, spa, indoor pool, full fitness facilities, a 25,000-square-foot meeting/conference space and 30,000-square-foot meeting/exhibition space.

Several local residents urged the committee to support the development, like Stu Johnston, who said he thinks it will provide the stimulation needed to help the area become a major attraction.

Fellow Miltonian Kevin Brackley concurred that with Campbellville businesses closing up due to lack of tourist traffic, the Mohawk expansion could help put the hamlet and Milton back on the map.

"The Mohawk project is something that will bring this community even closer together — not only Campbellville residents, but also the entire town of Milton," he said.

But Campbellville resident Sophie Cheney said while the development will provide employment, she doesn't think it'll make Campbellville's downtown a thriving centre.

"One or two businesses may benefit, but to suggest that this development can lead to village rejuvenation is completely unrealistic and ignores the historical evidence," she said.

Jane Holmes of the Woodbine Entertainment Group went on to encourage the committee to approve the staff recommendation.

She noted that the expansion at Mohawk will sustain existing jobs and directly and indirectly generate about 1,400 new jobs within the community.

Ward 3 Councillor Cindy Lunau asked her how important the new development is to the success of Mohawk as a racetrack.

Holmes said it's vital, pointing out that revenues from wagering on horses has been on the decline.

"Even though we see a great deal of money from the slots, the majority is still dependent on wagering," she said. "This (development) is very critical."

Standardbred Canada also came out to the meeting to voice its support for the proposal.

But not everyone had favourable things to say. James So — who appeared on behalf of the owners of the Mohawk Inn property — voiced opposition to the plans and alleged that

Woodbine is unfairly competing with the inn.

"Since the introduction of complimentary drinks and meals to casino patrons and Winner's Circle members, Mohawk Inn's food and beverage business with casino patrons has decreased," he noted. "This adverse financial impact is directly due to unfair competition."

But Robert Careless, Woodbine's secretary and treasurer, said he doesn't think Mohawk is competing against the Inn. "It's a different marketplace," he told the *Champion*.

He explained it's the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corporation that allows Winner's Circle members to redeem points they've collected for food vouchers.

Meanwhile, local farmer John Opsteen said although he took some comfort in reading that Woodbine would have to provide water immediately to any nearby residents whose water supply is impacted by the development, he emphasized the term "immediately" needs to be defined.

"Good quality and quantity of water is essential," he said.

The hydrogeologists for the project have said Mohawk's plans won't have an effect on nearby residents' wells. Pumping tests conducted on the wells on the property found that the proposed increase in water use will have no off-site impacts.

Councillors supportive of plans

Committee members went on to share their thoughts on the project.

Ward 2 Councillor Mike Boughton, Wards 2 and 4 Councillor Colin Best and Wards 1 and 3 Councillor Barry Lee all spoke in favour of the initiative.

Lee also noted that the Mohawk Inn is strongly supported by the community and said he'd like to see staff look into the issues it raised.

Ward 3 Councillor Cindy Lunau emphasized that Milton's rural area depends on the horse industry.

"If we were to lose Mohawk as a viable racetrack, we would become another potential development area," she said.

And fellow Ward 3 Councillor Jan Mowbray once again said she believes the development will help revitalize Campbellville.

Town council first held a public meeting on the proposal in 2003. But shortly after that, the Province's Greenbelt Act process started, which left Woodbine waiting to see how the new legislation could impact the property. The new act ultimately didn't affect the Mohawk lands.

• see CHANGES on page A16

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