

# Developer chilled out by rural subdivision freeze

By ROB KELLY  
The Champion

People interested in building pricey large rural homes for upscale buyers may be a little nervous about their business after a decision by Milton council Monday night.

Councillors turned down a proposed 15-home subdivision in northwestern rural Milton. The move was perhaps noteworthy on two fronts. First, it reversed an approval granted in 1990 for the same project. Second, three councillors made it clear they are having problems with the overall concept of creating these subdivisions, and two of them are rural representatives.

Both Marion Howard and Barry Lee, who represent the Ward 3 constituency in which the majority of such subdivisions are built, said the time has come to re-examine so-called rural estate subdivisions.

Monday night's case was no exception, although more complicated than most. The 15-lot subdivision proposed on Fifth Line south of 20 Sideroad was initially the brainchild of area builder Gary Robertson. It never got off the ground following the 1990 approval. Since that time, the Bank of Nova Scotia has seized the property under power of sale. But, said real estate agent Scott Pryor, the bank is working with Mr. Robertson in an attempt to forge a development deal.

Municipal planning department staffers favoured the proposal in a brief to councillors Monday night. Although the Town environmental rules for these projects have tightened since 1990, the Robertson project, known as Southgate, should proceed because the regulations weren't in effect then, planners said.

Also, planner Anne Bouck pointed out, none of the environmentally-oriented agencies contacted about the development — including the Ministries of Natural Resources, Environment, and Agriculture — voiced objections to the plan.

But that wasn't enough to sway council. After listening to more than two hours of presentations from staff, and neighbours largely opposed to the development (two of whom hired a lawyer to plead their case), councillors rejected Southgate in a 7-4 vote.

Ms Howard, who has opposed rural estate subdivisions in the past, said she came to Monday night's meeting with "an open mind." However, Southgate is contrary to the latest thrust of community planning, she said.

Her statement echoed the stance of lawyer Peter Pickfield, who opposed Southgate on behalf of his neighbouring clients, saying "this form of development has been largely discredited" because it is "scattered, rather than concentrated" around existing rural centres, like Brookville or Campbellville.

By allowing these building practices, Milton would increase the chances of rural estate subdivisions creating adverse environmental impacts, he cautioned. Southgate would break up farm land and possibly even

taint nearby water through septic contamination, he warned.

"Given the way planning practises and trends are going, now is the time for me to take a strong stance," councillor Howard said. "I'm going to turn it down. Development in the rural area should really come to a halt until we know what all the environmental impacts are."

Mr. Lee said the whole idea of rural estate subdivisions "was initiated on a trial basis" and he has come to the opinion "this is not a good concept."

The councillor also questioned the financial plan for Southgate. In the past, similar projects have "been developed by a local individual and followed through, merchandised, by

a local individual. In this case there seems to be no direction. Whether it's going to be flipped one, two, or three times, we just don't know."

Ward 2 councillor Colin Best said widely scattered rural subdivisions pose costly problems for municipal government, which must provide services such as fire protection and snowplowing. "How are we going

to service this area as a municipality? I can't support this."

Ward 1 councillor Rick Day said he was prepared to give Mr. Robertson, who is a local developer, every opportunity possible to salvage the situation, but that the sentiment fades once the bank has established power of sale. "If the game is over, it's over."



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