

Marathon region debate Gormley subdivision

by Jim Irving

Despite objections by the owners and Richmond Hill council, the town is going to wind up as landlord of some land it would rather be without. Last week, after a marathon debate in which every member of council spoke at least once, York Region council approved an amended recommendation to its planning committee to convey 28 acres of open space in a draft plan subdivision at Bayview Avenue and Gormley sideroad, to the town.

Until recently this land was part of Markham. The original recommendation called for the lands to be held in commons by the present owner, or future lot owners, "or to be conveyed to Richmond Hill, the region, or Metro Region, or Authority. The amendment to make it exclusively the town's concern was made by Vaughan Mayor Garnet Williams towards the end of the debate.

Owners opposed
First to speak on the matter was Elmore Houser, solicitor for the owners. A letter presented to council from the owners, announcing his visit, said they were not in agreement with the planning committee's proposal to have the open space under private control, "either by the present owners or by the future buying lot owners."

The letter said Richmond Hill council had "unanimously approved" — Richmond Hill Mayor Dave Schiller said later approval was not unanimous, but by a 6-3 vote — a plan to divide the 28 acres so they would

become part of each individual lot.

"We, as owners, agree with this position," the letter said.

It said that a check with 15 prospective buyers and future homeowners in the subdivision showed they were "also vehemently against not being able to have individual control of their property."

In his presentation, Houser said everyone agreed on the future of the land, but the regional planning department.

As Richmond Hill didn't want the land for parks, there was no reason to convey it to them, Houser said, "so we elected to keep them in private ownership."

"I ask you to go along with the plan as presented," the speaker said. "The owner would buy a lot at the front and a block at the rear."

"These are houses that we expect will sell at \$175,000 to \$200,000."

Communal ownership
So far as communal ownership was concerned, "how long would it last? No one is going to take an indirect interest in it, as an individual would," Houser said.

"The plan has been many years (5) in the getting; we would like to get on with it," he said.

He said the conservation authority said it

wanted to enter into an agreement with the owners to keep up the land, and the ministry of housing was "perfectly content with the way we plan it."

Richmond Hill Councillor Gordon Rowe said that, so far as the area being heavily treed, it was doubtful anyone with the "kind of money" necessary to move into the area would cut down any trees.

Unacceptable subdivision
Planning Commissioner Murray Pound said his department had no knowledge of the ministry accepting it.

The plan didn't conform to that plan, he said, and the number of lots on it was unacceptable.

There was also an "important precedent to consider" if the lots were extended into the valley area, he said.

It wasn't just a matter of that plan, but a "matter of application to future plans as well."

Councillor Lois Hancey of Richmond Hill said the town's Official Plan provided the flexibility for private ownership; the town was in a better position to interpret it than the region.

She said the conservation authority was concerned mainly about the condition of the woods.

One way of clearing up

the re-charge area would have to be individuals that owned the land in question, clear it up.

Ludicrous division
Taking the opposite view was Councillor Bob Adams of Markham.

"Anything we can do to preserve the area, we should," he said.

"I think that dividing it into small lots is ludicrous."

A subsequent motion that the land be donated to Ontario Heritage Foundation was defeated.

"They can't even clean up the land they already own," said Councillor Rowe.

"My phone never stops ringing." He said he thought the developers were "entitled to some consideration."

Councillors divided
Mayor Bob Forhan of Newmarket said in some cases natural resources

could be better controlled privately. If not, a public body should be allowed to go in and resolve the issue.

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