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Environmentalists upset by tree cutting in Bethesda

ROGER BELGRAVE
Staff Reporter

Members of the Sierra Club, a local environmental group, have been stunned by a developer's tree-clearing expedition in the Bethesda Forest.

Agreeing with references on a regional map, the group points out the Bethesda Forest is one of the most environmentally significant areas in Whitchurch-Stouffville.

Jackie Erickson is chair for the club's conservation and environment branch in York Region. She first noticed the bulldozing activity in the Bethesda Estates just off Woodbine Avenue a few months ago.

When the dust cleared, she was startled to find a portion of the forest gone. A strip about 20 metres wide stretching from Woodbine Avenue to the existing development had been cleared of trees.

Within planning guidelines According to town planning officials, the construction activity falls within planning guidelines for a second access road to the Bethesda Forest Estates development.

But that does little to ease the concerns of Erickson and other Sierra Club members.

"It staggers my mind at how quickly they did this," said Erickson. "I like anyone else understand that roads have to be put in. But not in the most environmentally sensitive area in all of Whitchurch-Stouffville."

Kurt Schmid, developer for the estates, said plans for the road were approved by town council in 1987. Schmid also insisted the forest is an integral part of the development.

"Our policy throughout that subdivision has been to minimize any cutting of trees," he said.

"The trees were not indiscriminately removed, and only those trees that needed to be cut down to install the road were cleared," said Schmid.

Neither the town nor developer could estimate the actual number of

trees chopped down.

Engineers for the town venture out to the site on a regular basis to ensure the developer is staying within planning guidelines. But the planning department has the power to do little else.

"It is very difficult without a (tree) bylaw in place to police what the developer is doing," said Glen VanDusen, an engineer for the town.

A landowner virtually has a free hand to cut down trees on his own property, VanDusen explained.

According to Erickson, the tree clearing has already affected wildlife in the vicinity. Once their habitat was disturbed "the deer immediately started jumping across Woodbine," she said.

Erickson, who lives on Skyridge Court not far from the site, has been one of many to notice the animals scurrying for cover.

Bethesda is one of three areas in Whitchurch-Stouffville the region has recognized as environmentally sensitive.

Preston Lake problems Preston Lake is another area characterized as either environmentally significant, wetlands or a life science area of natural and scientific interest.

Already polluted, land around Preston Lake has been left barren by development for years, said Erickson. Soil has been allowed to run into the lake, making its pollution even worse, she believes.

"Why develop such a sensitive area with the lake polluted already you shouldn't allow something like this to happen and sit for four or five years," she said.

"That should not have happened and with the new guidelines it shouldn't happen again."

The Sierra Club is hoping the province's recent release of implementation guidelines to protect significant features and control development of the Oak Ridges Moraine will prevent similar development activity in the future.

She also predicted the new guidelines should take some of the pressure off the local council when it comes to making decisions about new development in the moraine

area. Erickson, a real estate broker who used to sell properties on developments in environmentally sensitive areas similar to Bethesda Estates,

said she has seen the error of her ways.

"I still believe we need development but none on areas that are designated significant," she said.



Photo: SJOERD WITTEVEEN



Jackie Erickson, above, points to the way that she and other members of the Sierra Club would like to see land in the Bethesda Road and Woodbine Avenue area preserved. A housing development in the area, Bethesda Forest Estates, cut down a number of trees in the area (photo at left) to build a 20-metre wide access road into the estate. Erickson said that since the trees were cut down wildlife in the area, including deer, have been scurrying for cover. Though the cutting has environmentalists upset, the developers were within their rights to cut down the trees since they do own the property, said a Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville official.

New surface on Stouffville track open for business

Yet another first for the Stouffville Community Track became a reality last Tuesday as the rubberized-asphalt surface was put down.

And the track is the first in the province to use a surface made from recycled Ontario tires.

Were the first in Ontario to have track made from Ontario's recycled tires," said Ged Stonehouse of the Community Track Committee.

"The rubber pellets used to come from either the U.S. or Quebec, but they're getting them from Ontario now," he added.

"So our track helps the environment as well."

Crupi Paving laid the surface on Tuesday, and signs were up during the week asking people to stay off the surface in order to give it a chance to firm up.

However, as of today those signs should be down and the track will be open to

business, said Stonehouse.

"It will be open and available for public use on the weekend," he said.

The surface is a combination of asphalt and rubber, which is nine per cent rubber by weight and 35 per cent rubber by volume.

The track will be much better for joggers than running on a hard concrete surface without any spring.

"It's a marvellous surface," said Stone-

house.

"It looks like asphalt but feels like rubber. You can actually feel it, you can push it down with your fingers."

Track project co-ordinator Don Bigoni did his typically superb job in getting a good deal on the paving job, said Stonehouse.

He added that lines and markings should be painted on the track within the next two weeks.



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