

Notes made during a Meeting of the General Memberhip of the Harmony Residents Group Inc. in the evening of August 12, 2009, in the Virgil Arena large meeting room.

This meeting began at 7:10 PM with about 60 people present.

The first speaker was Ms. Jeanette Brindle, Field Superintendant for South-Western Ontario for Parks Canada (PC), who presented a concept for the use of the PC Lakeshore property in Niagara-on-the-Lake. Also present was Mr. Douglas Stewart of PC to answer questions and another PC employee who operated the projector used in the visual part of the presentation which was, essentially, similar to that made to the Town Council on July 27.

PC has seven sites within the Niagara area and their mandate is to protect and present all of them but only Fort George is staffed. The proposition from Project Niagara (PN) offers PC an opportunity to open the 268 acres of the Lakeshore property to the public. Only the part east of 2 Mile Creek is an historic site which extends into the Chautauqua residential area.

The project visuals showed several options essentially identical to those contained in the latest (Phase 3) presentation by Hatch, Mott and MacDonald engineers, concerning the projected increase in the capacity of the local Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP), except for a small area indicated for possible use by PN in that location. The first option for PC is to do nothing, leave the area as it is and allow the WWTP to expand in its present location. The other options exist only because of the PN proposition, all of which require moving the WWTP, at considerable extra expense, to the west of the PC property, or to town property south of Lakeshore Road, opposite the entrance to Niagara Shores Park, or elsewhere.

Her presentation was interrupted by numerous questions, some of which were answered by Mr. Stewart. A question asked if PC is opposed to propositions other than that made by PN and the answer was no, but PN offers the potential of another ¼ Million visitors to this town and that the WWTP would have to be moved to accommodate PN. A comment from the audience was that it is difficult to understand that, with more than 3 Million visitors to the town now, how another ¼ Million could make a significant difference to opening the Lakeshore property. Another comment questioned the logic of moving the WWTP with the upset and additional expense involved when PN could locate elsewhere on the PC property.

In response to questions about the use of this Property as an ecological park or nature preserve Ms. Brindle replied that their mandate is to protect and present historic sites, not to provide recreational areas for town residents.

Mr. Stewart said that PC has only received a proposition from PN, not a plan in detail and that, when such was received, PC would make an agreement with the PN Board of Directors, part of which would include the right of PC to monitor the terms of agreement and review any proposal by PN to sublet any part of the property which they might be given to control. Regarding an environmental assessment he stated that the federal government has a very stringent process that PC must follow and that part of the assessment is the determination of the effects of the noise, traffic, pollution, etc., and that PC will meet its obligations with respect to the Environmental Assessment Act, also that PN, not PC, must pay for the Assessment.

Ms. Brindle said that their current options are based on the assumption that PN will proceed.

R. Busbridge said that the Harmony Group has been unable to obtain a detailed PC plan for the

use of the Lakeshore property and now it is evident that one does not exist at present but would like to understand the process that PC will follow. He asked if PN will provide financial estimates for their proposition including the most optimistic and pessimistic assumptions. Ms. Brindle replied that the hope was that such would be forthcoming and Mr. Stewart added that, with respect to the availability of government grants to assist PN, such decisions will be made by the Minister of Finance and the Treasury department. He said that the next step in their process would be the approval in principle of the PN proposition, after the details of it have been received.

A question was how PC became aware of the PN proposition and the reply was by way of a telephone call to Mr. Robert Andrews who forwarded it to senior PC administrators. A comment was that the public was not aware that PC was waiting for proposals for the Lakeshore property and the reply was that they were not but would respond to any proposal including one for an ecological park.

A request was that PC explain better to the public the status of the Lakeshore property to which the reply was that the concept was presented to Town Council on July 27. The third PC person said that their mandate applies to the historic part of the Lakeshore property, not the natural area but that an Act of Parliament requires their review of their management of natural historic sites and that the next review is in 2012.

This part of the meeting ended at 8:25 PM with audience applause. R. Busbridge invited the PC people to come to a future meeting to expand on the steps to be followed by their handling of proposals for the use of the Lakeshore property.

The second speaker was Dr. John Bacher, a research scientist.

His proposal is that the PC Lakeshore property in its entirety become a natural area for the protection of wildlife and the expansion of the indigenous forest, possible only on public land because agricultural property in the Niagara area is far too expensive for that purpose and on which wildlife is considered as pests. He contends that this proposal is a broader concept of the use of land and that the battle of Fort George is not relevant to it.

A Natural Resources Report in 1976 states that 95% of Ontario lake plain forests have been removed and that this Lakeshore property is the only substantial area that remains, which should be expanded to include all the estuaries of 4, 3 and 2 Mile Creeks and linked together with the beach areas between them. Two Mile Creek has the greatest bio-diversity of life in this area and the existing lagoons could be converted easily to structured wetlands, proven to be effective in the treatment of natural wastes and which could serve as a habitat and breeding area for wildfowl.

A question was what could be done to reduce the erosion of the lake shoreline. He replied that some of the options presented by PC involve destruction of part of the existing forest, that the natural eco system of the area bordering the lake is forest, that its removal has exacerbated erosion and that both the forest and wetlands should be expanded, not reduced. Rare species have survived in the Lakeshore property because human access to it has been difficult.

Dr. Bacher stressed that his concept of a natural area for the Lakeshore property can be realized only by the involvement of the public and their lobbying of politicians

This part of the meeting ended at 9:05 PM with audience applause.

R. Busbridge asked members to return their signed petitions which he intends to present to Town

Council on August 31st.

Gracia Janes said that this night's meeting had accomplished much in obtaining PC agreement to make more public the current and future process in their concepts for the use of the Lakeshore property. She said that contributions to the Conservancy are eligible for income tax receipts and such contributions could be used to pay for newspaper advertisement.

Alan McKenzie asked about the stance of Music Niagara regarding the PN proposition and the reply was that its Board of Directors has decided to remain neutral in this matter.

A newcomer to this area commented that the Niagara Centre for the Performing Arts on St. Paul Street in St. Catharines is a year round facility that was not considered in the PN feasibility study when it was made.

This meeting adjourned at 9:20 PM.

Cliff James