

localnews

■ LOSING FIGHT AGAINST SPRAWL

Newest subdivision plan will eat up more biologically-rich green space

Many Peterborough citizens are concerned by how residential growth is happening in our city. Like so many people, I am uncomfortable with the idea of an ever-expanding city, continually adding new, mostly low-density developments to its perimeter. I envision rather a more compact city in which most new residential development occurs within the existing built-up area and where high-quality natural areas such as Jackson Park, the Jackson Creek East wetland and the Harper Park area are not compromised. Easy access to biologically-rich green spaces such as these is one reason why many of us choose to live in Peterborough.

My concerns about development were reawakened when I heard of the city's plans to eventually develop the huge area between Lily Lake (south of Lily Lake Rd. and east of Ackison Rd.) and Fairbairn St. The development would eventually cover 500 acres of what is mostly farmland and include 3,000 housing units and a potential population of 8,400 people. This is approximately three times the population of Lakefield and would be Peterborough's largest development ever. The project will also abut the Trans-Canada Trail along Jackson Creek and be only 500 metres from the Provincially Significant Jackson Creek East wetland. This is the magnificent wetland you cross when walking between the trail bridge at Lily Lake and Ackison Rd.

At this point, city council has voted simply to "receive" the consultants' reports on the project. The reports make up the Lily Lake Functional Planning Study and can be found on the City's website. The secondary plan process will now begin. The planning department assures us that at this point, nothing is set in stone but that remains to be seen. Many of



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the people who attended an initial public meeting about the project felt that it was more an information session about what is about to be created than a true consultation seeking the public's input.

As part of the planning study, Nibble Environmental Associates of Lindsay prepared an excellent Natural Environment Report. In addition to being extremely complete, the report spells out in great detail the incredibly rich diversity of animal and plant species that inhabit the Jackson Creek East wetland. I can attest to this rich biodiversity from first-hand experience, since I walk there regularly. This is one of the few areas in Peterborough where residents can observe everything from beavers to wood ducks, often at close range. The wetland is also included on the just-released map of the Kawarthas Naturally Connected (KNC) preferred solution. The City of Peterborough was one of many partners and stakeholders participating in the KNC process. The map shows a connected system of natural areas in the Kawarthas with the objective of facilitating more sustainable land use planning.

The Niblett report also explains that the Jackson Creek wetland contains a significant population of snapping turtles, an animal recently added to Ontario's list of Species at Risk. This is largely a result of roadkill, the predation of turtle nests by raccoons and the destruction and degradation of the turtles' wetland habitat as a result of development. The report also contains recommendations on how to best protect the turtles and their wet-

land habitat, should the project proceed. These include having 30 metre buffer zones from any development, creating artificial nesting sites for the turtles and planting native trees and shrubs to create visual and physical barriers. However, it is hard to imagine how these measures could mitigate the damage from a development of this magnitude. The impact of so many people, cars and buildings located literally next door to the wetland and trail will be huge. The aesthetic experience of walking the trail will also suffer immensely. Let's not forget, either, that 500 housing units are already being built on Parkhill Rd. west, a development that almost backs onto to the same wetland.

We can't have it both ways: Peterborough as an environmentally progressive city with easy access to quality natural areas and, at the same time, Peterborough as a physically expanding city, spilling out on its edges. There will be a loser and, as is almost always the case, it will be the natural environment. As one speaker said at City Hall this past Monday night, "we uprooted from South Ajax in the GTA and chose to move to Peterborough exactly one year ago. Ironically, we moved to escape the urban sprawl, as I witnessed first-hand the impact of new developments to the south area of Ajax. Now it feels as though I am having déjà vu."

If Lily Lake was the only example of urban sprawl development in Peterborough, there might be a reason to feel more positive about the direction the city seems to be taking. However, there are currently more than 15 different subdivision developments on the city's perimeter that are either built out, under construction right now or have received draft approval. All of these are occurring on agricultural land or on green space. Some of

these projects include Halminen Homes on Airport Rd.; Activa Holdings on Carnegie Avenue near the zoo; Peterborough Homes on Parkhill Rd. west (Jackson Creek Meadows); Mason Homes between Chemong Rd. and Hilliard St., north of Portage Place; Peterborough Homes in Waverly Heights off of Armour Rd. north (Thompson Bay Estates); AON Inc. on Guthrie Drive and McNamara Rd. on the south side of Highway 115; Fairview Estates on the Ireland Drive extension near Brealey Drive; John Boddy Developments on Television Rd. and Laurie Avenue near Willowcreek Plaza and Towerhill Development on the Marsdale Rd. extension near Beavermead Park. These latter two projects both back on to the Downer's Corners Wetland. The subdivisions I've listed above will add approximately 2,547 housing units to the city, more than half of which are low density homes (single detached and semi-detached). You can add to this list the commercial development and new road slated for the Harper Park area, located west of Rye St. and Harper Rd. Although hardly known to most city residents, this area contains Peterborough's finest and largest block of natural habitat and is home to an ancient population of brook trout.

To be fair to the city's planning department, Peterborough has been identified by the province as a growth centre and is therefore committed to provide housing. The province's growth projections for Peterborough may even be revised upwards. At the same time, however, the province of Ontario is stipulating that by 2015 and every year thereafter, a minimum of 40% of all new residential development must be within the existing built-up area. This type of "intensification" includes construction on vacant parcels of land, redevelopment

projects in older neighbourhoods, converting existing buildings into condominiums and possibly even adding apartments to existing houses. There is some intensification happening in Peterborough already, one example being the 500 units of affordable housing that have been added recently. Westview Village condominiums off of Lansdowne St. beside Holy Cross school is another example. Some future intensification projects will include the former St. Joseph's Hospital and YMCA building. I would argue that a much greater emphasis on development through intensification is the way our city should be going.

I am not alone in having these concerns. In 2011, the City of Peterborough held a number of workshops to learn from the public about their vision of the city's future. This was part of the ongoing Official Plan Review. Quoting from the report, "a consistent theme at all of the sessions was the desire to ensure that the Official Plan continue to support the emphasis on a green and natural city, with preservation and protection of the natural environment. The public noted the significance of the following: Protect and enhance green spaces. Develop incentives for more environmentally sustainable community design." I fail to see how there is anything in the Lily Lake project or most other subdivisions underway that protects and enhances green space or provides environmentally sustainable community design.

To conclude, the problem is not just the Lily Lake project. No one project in itself will imperil the snapping turtle or any other species. The problem is that there is a war of attrition being waged on the natural world all around us. It is destruction of habitat and species by a thousand tiny cuts. I am willing to accept some development of natural areas within

the existing built-up area in the name of intensification, but only if the sprawl on the city's edges is reduced to a minimum.

The on-going challenge in Peterborough is to find ways in which residential development can proceed in the most sustainable, least harmful way possible. Let the city know what you think regarding Lily Lake and about growth in general as reflected by the Official Plan which is currently being revised. To comment on the Little Lake project, go to the city's home page at www.peterborough.ca Click on "One Click Away" on the right hand side and scroll down to Studies. Click on Lily Lake Functional Planning Study where you can access the consultants' reports. You can send an email with your comments directly to the staff contact. There will be more opportunities to comment over the coming year as the Lily Lake project moves into the secondary plan level. Anyone wanting to receive direct notice of any meetings can send an email to Brad Appleby at bappleby@peterborough.ca

At "One Click Away," you can also scroll down to Official Plan Review and simply use the email address to send along your comments. I have been told that all feedback and comments will be considered. Another way to stay up-to-date regarding development pressures is to join Friends of Jackson Park by sending an email to friendsofjacksonpark@gmail.com

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