

?Time to turn things around? for Aurora wildlife

The application to develop privately-owned land north of Henderson Drive has recently been re-submitted to the Town. It contains a request to remove an astonishing 49,105 sq. ft. of protected woodland to build two estate homes, an increase of 43% over what was originally specified. It's bad enough that anyone would wish to remove over 49,000 sq. ft. of mature forests, but there's also a more hidden tragedy: the consequences to the abundant wildlife that exists peacefully in and around these properties, including two endangered species of bat and our local Snapping Turtle. Furthermore, when looking past the smoke and mirrors, it appears that the application has systematically undervalued the very environmental treasures that four Town By-laws currently protect.

The applicant's representative describes relief from the four environmental By-laws that protect these lands as a 'technicality?'. Such confidence is troubling yet can sadly be understood just by looking around Aurora these days, where so much green space is disappearing before our very eyes. The message is clear ? unless we act now, the environmental carnage will simply continue until the last piece of green land is paved over and the financially-driven opportunists move on.

Over 49,000 sq. ft. of endangered bat habitat will need to be 'removed' (as described in the application) to make room for these two estate homes, despite the fact that such habitat is legally protected by the Endangered Species Act (ESA) as well as the By-laws. The applicant's representatives have been discussing 'mitigation' measures with the local Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) to enable the development to go ahead. From what we've seen, these so-called measures are no more than a severe case of 'lip service'.

The existence of snapping turtles within the proposed development area is extremely well-documented. It takes a snapping turtle 15 to 20 years to reach maturity. Therefore, a construction project of this size will likely have devastating consequences since the loss of even one turtle can have significant impacts on a local population. Yet the application fails to address the impacts to this Special Concern species, noting that it was only seen beside and not on the properties during a site visit and, therefore, presumably concluded that an examination of its potential fate was unwarranted.

The application notes that all breeding amphibians were only heard calling off-site of the properties, even though this is a wetland area with a permanent stream meandering through.

No Species at Risk (SAR) birds were recorded, despite the Special Concern Red-headed Woodpecker having been frequently recorded on the lands by local residents. Populations of the Red-headed Woodpecker have declined by over 60% in Ontario due to habitat loss. Two Special Concern birds recorded in the area by MNRF were noted on the application as declining in numbers due to such factors as 'Brown-headed Cowbird nest parasitism' when, in fact, habitat loss due to urban development is a major factor listed on the Ontario SAR website. The application fails to touch on the effects of significantly disrupting a delicately balanced, pristine ecosystem, particularly in unprecedented times of climate change. Considering that, as part of due process, the application is required to include all relevant environmental impacts, it fails miserably in coming even close to the stark reality - this proposed development presents a significant crisis for the resident wildlife. It refers to 'temporary displacement' and 'disturbance during construction works' but our local wildlife is running out of options. Case Woodlot, across the road, is a busy, public area. Restoration tree planting provides no solution for the extensive numbers of wildlife that rely on dead or decaying trees, including endangered bats and our Red-headed Woodpecker.

In summary, even though the properties are privately owned, the applicant can only build if the four Town By-laws that currently protect the lands are waived. In the coming weeks, the Town will be producing a report which will ultimately influence the decision of the Council-appointed Committee of Adjustment.

Please support the 'Save the Henderson Drive Forest' group by calling the Town Planning department (phone: 905 727 3123 ext. 4226) and let them know that our community values its forests and its wildlife and that we've had enough of this environmental destruction. Ask for your conversation to be documented and placed on file. Please call local Councillors and seek their support. Join the Facebook page, 'Save the Henderson Drive Forest?'. Importantly, attend the Committee of Adjustment meeting when the applications are considered (date to be decided). By upholding our By-laws, we all stand to win ? allow this development to go ahead and we all lose. After all, as World Wildlife Foundation Canada so rightly says: 'The fate of wildlife within Canada is in our hands. It's time to come together and turn things around?.'

Wendy Kenyon

Save the Henderson Drive Forest group