

Henderson Forest fight continues

After initially questioning the environmental impacts, Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority (LSRCA) recently reversed course and gave its blessing to the destruction of protected Woodland and Endangered Species Habitat on Henderson Drive in order to make way for two large estate homes. This, in itself, represents a shocking move by an agency funded by our tax dollars and mandated to protect these precise environmental features on the Oak Ridges Moraine. Moreover, equally troubling is that the decision was made despite the fact that major issues previously raised by LSRCA have still not been addressed by the Applicant. The good news is that LSRCA is simply one part of the process, with the Town's appointed Committee of Adjustment ultimately deciding on these applications. However, since LSRCA's opinion plays a pivotal role in the process, we're asking this ? why has the Conservation Authority suddenly gone against its own mandate to protect the Oak Ridges Moraine and why is no one talking? Up until August of this year, it seemed that LSRCA was correctly holding the Applicant accountable in having to demonstrate that the ecological integrity of the Oak Ridges Moraine would be unharmed, as is required by the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan (ORMCP). We welcomed the fact that LSRCA appeared to be pushing back, insisting the Applicant describe the damage in detail so that it could be properly assessed. Due to the number of key natural heritage features on the lands and the huge impacts already documented by the Applicant, the expectation was that LSRCA would ultimately use its powers to put the brakes on a development that clearly should not be happening for a multitude of sound environmental and legal reasons. This includes the existence of four Town By-laws that are aligned with the ORMCP and which currently prohibit any development or site alteration. Yet LSRCA's latest move defies all logic, suddenly concluding that its ?comments have been addressed? by the Applicant when, in fact, they most certainly have not.

LSRCA had previously asked the Applicant to ?clearly demonstrate that no negative impact will be afforded to observed and candidate significant wildlife habitat?, including the Snapping Turtle. This has not been demonstrated. The impacts to Significant Woodland remain ?inconclusive?, with the Applicant unable to demonstrate that there will be ?no negative or adverse impact? to its ecological integrity, including microhabitat. A tree inventory was requested by the Town to enable LSRCA, the Town and the Committee of Adjustment to assess, with more accuracy, the extent of environmental damage.

Several months later the Applicant has still not complied. Impacts to Significant Valleyland have also not been adequately addressed. Instead of insisting on all this information, LSRCA has given a premature and inexplicable green light, subject to minimal conditions that fail to justify the environmental carnage that this agency has now endorsed.

On September 13th we reached out to LSRCA's CAO, Mike Walters, presenting the multiple issues that remain unaddressed and requesting an explanation for LSRCA's decision. He asked for our patience while he reviewed the document with his staff. Over seven weeks later, we are still awaiting that detailed response and our patience has been overly tested. So what should we gauge from this? If a sound basis exists, it should not be this difficult to share the information that was used in order to justify such a crucial decision.

Please join us in this continued fight to protect Aurora's trees, waterways and species at risk. Contact Mike Walters, CAO of LSRCA (905-895-1281 or m.walters@lsrca.on.ca) and ask him to explain LSRCA's premature decision on the Henderson Drive applications. Urge him to uphold the mandate to ?protect, enhance and restore nature?, which was publicized so enthusiastically at LSRCA's 2018 Annual General Meeting. The fight to protect the Henderson Drive forest is important, not just for the community in the Henderson Drive vicinity, but for everyone who lives in Aurora and beyond. Why? Because this fight is not just about preserving an area of outstanding beauty with its trees and at-risk wildlife nor is it just about protecting the stream, Tannery Creek, that runs from the properties northwards through the Town. It is about what these lands represent - a legacy to our children who must learn the importance of preserving the environment. It's a fight that involves us all because, unless we speak out, the woodlands around you today are not necessarily going to be there tomorrow.

Save the Henderson Drive Forest Group
Aurora