

Future business park plan touted for environmental initiatives

By Brock Weir

A future 87-acre business park slated for the east side of Leslie Street, just north of Wellington Street, could pave the way for future area developments when it comes to the environment, according to proponents.

Plans for the Addison Hall business park, which will be part of the 2C Development and could potentially make way for 7,600 future jobs in the area, are slated to come before Council for final approval next month.

In the lead-up to that approval, however, what is anticipated to hit the Council table has already won plaudits for environmental initiatives expected to take place on the land once ground is broken.

"This initiative is the result of a challenge that was thrown out by the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority (LSRCA) to have us implement low-impact development techniques to reduce the effect of storm water management ponds and associated impacts of long-term maintenance of those ponds," said Jim Kennedy of KLM planning, speaking at Aurora's most recent public planning meeting.

This challenge, he said, has resulted in out-of-the-ordinary projects to tackle what he described as "four small, unclassified wetlands" on the site, totalling 1.3 hectares, currently in the way of development plans. These wetlands, he said, were "assessed to characterize their ecological and hydrogeological function" and will be replaced elsewhere on site.

"We are going to replicate and enhance the ecological functions contributing to the water balance," said Mr. Kennedy. "We are going to provide habitat for flora and fauna with a goal of enhancing biodiversity."

Building on this, he also said an additional goal is for the development to have a "low impact" on the land surrounding it. Means to achieve this include rooftop storage of rain water, and "infiltration galleries" to draw water from the roofs back into these replicated wetlands, all under the auspices of the Town and the LSRCA.

"The Conservation Authority is very excited about this and so is our staff," said Marco Ramunno, Aurora's Director of Planning, noting he aimed to have a report with recommendations on final zoning approvals pertaining to the subdivision by September.

Speaking in favour of what she described as a "terrific proposal," Councillor Wendy Gaertner said this project ticked all the boxes.

"Our official plan speaks to the fullest, highest and best use [of the land]," she said. "I think that is happening here and I am really pleased to see the amount of retail that is allowed, the 20 per cent is not being used and the jobs provided are more in line with real employment."

Added Mayor Geoffrey Dawe: "We're very pleased your group is bringing this forward and we are very much looking forward to it."

By the time this proposal came to Public Planning, Councillors had an early opportunity to warm to the idea last spring when the LSRCA came to Council, speaking about this project as a way forward for all future developments. Speaking to environmental problems created by run-off in developed areas, a solution can be found in "RainScaping" technology that will soon be found at Addison Hall.

This was the view of Michael Walters, General Manager of Watershed Management for the LSRCA, who said developers should be encouraged to adopt these practices so new builds will have minimal impact on the environment.

Addison Hall is a departure from current practices which often focus on the creation and maintenance of storm water management ponds rather than using the natural resources on hand to manage water.

?It tries to maintain the natural hydrogeology on the site so the overall integrity of our watershed is protected, and that means the amount of water that used to fall on the site and go onto the ground [is balanced],? said Mr. Walters, noting paving areas often increases run-off.

?Despite [ponds] we are still seeing declines in our urban rivers in quality and quantity and, as a result, we are finding them more costly to maintain. Some of the impacts are decreases in groundwater discharge and increases in surface run-off, increases in stream bank erosion and the risk of flooding associated with cumulative impacts, and there is costly routine maintenance at all of these facilities. If they are not maintained, they can become a source of phosphorus pollution.?

RainScaping, on the other hand, shies away from pond creation focusing on a number of urban design principles, such as water harvesting, water gardens, permeable pavement, and green roofs.

The LSRCA, he added, is looking at existing plans and looking at opportunities where some of these initiatives can be implemented.