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Trout Unlimited Canada



Greg Clark Chapter

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Town of Erin pays only \$2 for 5 Hectares of Prime Real Estate? Something Fishy going on with the Sewage Plant Land Deal

ERIN: Mayor Alls of Erin boasted, *"I can reach in my pocket and pay for it"* when the Town of Erin announced the purchase of 5 Hectares of land for \$2 - land with an estimated value of \$210,000 in the Environmental Study Report (ESR).

Environmental lawyer David Donnelly spoke to the more than 300 people attending the March 25th virtual meeting to discuss the impact of the proposed Erin Wastewater Treatment Plant on dumping 7.2 million liters of sewage effluent daily into West Credit River Brook Trout habitat.

Donnelly said that Mayor Alls statement *"raises a number of questions about the propriety of this so-called sale. When you pay \$2 for a piece of extremely valuable land it leads, correctly in my opinion, to the suspicion that there is a quid pro quo deal here, or that this is a gift. There is no justification or rationale whatsoever for a \$2 purchase. If this \$2 purchase is done as some part of a development agreement, then what is the developer getting? If there is an agreement here with the developer, it should be part of a properly constituted statutory public meeting that also gives the public the right of appeal"*.

Donnelly added *"To me it looks like a gift or a magic trick, neither of which are permitted by the Municipal Act. The community should be asking the Mayor for a complete written explanation of how such valuable land can be purchased for only \$2"*.

"It sounds pretty fishy", said Judy Mabee, President of the Belfountain Community Organization, and supporting member of the Coalition.

The Coalition for the West Credit River also [presented evidence to the community](#) of major damage done to the 39-hectare parcel of land which includes a 5-hectare parcel on which the proposed Erin Wastewater Treatment Plant would be situated.

In December, residents noticed work had already begun on this greenbelt forested area when smoke was seen billowing up off the land. Brush was being cut and burned, massive trees pulled out by their roots with large construction machinery, and land stripped and graded. This large machinery also caused severe damage to a Brook Trout nursery stream that flows into the West Credit River, with deep ruts cutting into the streambed and surrounding wetland, destroying approximately 100m² of fish habitat and 3,000m² of the Provincially Significant West Credit River Wetland Complex. The damage inflicted on this land is being investigated by provincial and federal regulators.

The Mayor says, *"the land adjacent to the chosen site is a private property and farming activities continue on it"*. However, this land is zoned as Greenbelt Natural Heritage System - not agricultural. These large excavators that caused the damage were not farm equipment, they were large machines with grappling jaws. Wellington County farmers are well-respected stewards of our forests, wetlands and streams in southern Ontario and know better.

This severely damaged parcel of land is designated as a Provincially Significant West Credit River Wetland Complex, and Species-at-Risk Woodlands. In fact, the ESR identified a number of species at risk, rare and uncommon plants and migratory birds that would require several federal and provincial permits and authorizations before any work could proceed on the land or stream. Yet, we have confirmed that no permits or authorizations were issued.

The Coalition is also concerned whether the Town of Erin kept a number of commitments it made in the ESR once the site for the wastewater plant was chosen. The ESR committed to completing an Addendum to the ESR, an Environmental Management Plan, an Arborist Report for all affected areas, an additional bird survey, and a Stage 2 Archaeological Assessment.

“How can the Town of Erin fulfill these commitments when many of the trees and habitat for which the studies were to address have now been removed from the area”, adds Judy Mabee.

The Coalition for the West Credit River represents the following organizations: the Belfountain Community Organization, Izaak Walton Fly Fishing Club, Ontario Rivers Alliance, Ontario Streams, Trout Unlimited Canada - Greg Clark Chapter and the West Credit River Watch.

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