

Wellington Federation of Agriculture urges Erin council to protect agriculture land in future

Angelica Babiera

Federation was the lone delegate during public meeting for proposed 332 residential unit development in Hillsburgh

ERIN - The Wellington Federation of Agriculture is urging Erin council to think twice about rezoning prime agricultural land for future development use.

Janet Harrop, president of WFA, was the only person from the public who spoke up at last week's public meeting for Hillsburgh Heights Inc's draft plan proposal to build 332 residential units in Hillsburgh. The developer needs Official Plan and zoning bylaw amendments before the plan can move forward.

No decision was made at the meeting.

Harrop, noting that growing up is as important as growing out, said she was at the meeting to advocate for farmland that might be considered for development down the road.

Hillsburgh Heights Inc. is planning to build 332 residential units and provide land for a possible future school and park just west of Trafalgar Road and north of Upper Canada Drive in Hillsburgh.

Of the 332 residential units, 284 will be single detached dwellings and 48 will be street townhouse dwelling units.

Harrop pointed out the importance of preserving agricultural land in Wellington County as the lands in the county are some of the most fertile and productive lands in Ontario.

"Although we do realize that this parcel of land was identified as future development and it is within the current urban boundary, we just want to come forward and speak to farmland in the future," said Harrop over Zoom at the meeting.

"I really feel we're in a position currently in our comprehensive review to look at properties such as those being developed and look at future requests for that agricultural land to be used within the urban expansion and recognizing the importance of agricultural land."

Harrop noted that some of the frontages on the proposed draft plan on lands that are currently on agricultural zones are excessive, when these lands can be further used for agriculture.

"The Town of Erin has primary, secondary lands and secondary agricultural lands

are still very suitable for varying agricultural uses such as pasturing. We want to highlight the need to pause and consider agricultural land rezoning in your future priorities," she said.

"As we move into recognizing carbon sequestration in the fight against greenhouse gas reduction, agricultural land becomes even more important. We would like to see how this is being built up more as opposed to out."

Mayor Allan Alls explained when he was at the county planning committee meeting earlier that day, a staff report was submitted to the committee stated that very little acreage was taken from the prime agricultural inventory in the last little while; the county prioritizes agricultural land as well as residential developments.

Meanwhile, Coun. Rob Smith wondered how the developers will be implementing electric vehicle charging stations as it is one of the requirements for the draft plan and the town's aim to be more green.

"I see the draft plan is required to have electric vehicle implementations but I'm wondering if our building code requires to have this, not that this is a bad thing, it's just not specified. We need to have this specified and required in our building code as this is where the future is going and we're trying to be more green. I want all of them to be required to have EV charging stations, not just some," said Smith.

Alls noted that Hydro will be insisting to implement electric vehicle charging stations in municipalities' building codes, so council should see the codes coming.

In regards to the wastewater treatment plant, Coun. Michael Robins wondered what was the timeline of the construction of the development as well as the plant, and if there's any impact on facilitating the ability of existing households to get access to the plant since the residential developments are far from the plant.

"We've already awarded the tender for the wastewater treatment plant which includes the capacity to service this development, so that it will be constructed in the next two years. We are getting ready to tender for the collection system which includes segments one to four, and segment four will service Hillsburgh up to Trafalgar Road," explained town's director of infrastructure services and engineer, Nick Colucci.

"So, this development will be serviced and the developer will be responsible for external servicing from the development to the end of that segment. This will be constructed in the next two years and tendered in one piece. As for the existing properties in Hillsburgh, we will be servicing the existing homes and businesses on Trafalgar Road as we build segment four. Other properties in Hillsburgh will have to service that at a later date."