

Campground seeks to expand facilities south of Coe Hill

By Jim Eadie

Discussion about a rezoning and site plan control bylaw for the Bear Ridge Campground located on The Ridge Road in Wollaston Township consumed a large portion of the regular meeting of Wollaston Township council on Feb. 26. A new family has recently purchased the campground, and family member Jason Morrison outlined his hopes to improve and enlarge the size of the camping facilities. The plan will first require several parcels of their land to be rezoned together as "Recreational Resort Commercial Special," in order to allow the expansion back into the property. His site plan, which is also required to be approved by council, calls for an increase from 32, to up to 100 sites and two additional cabins as well as a recreational area including volleyball and horseshoes.

Mark Moore, a local resident and an abutting landowner spoke to council about his concerns with the proposal. Moore objected to the rezoning, and expressed his worries related to potential crowding, pollution and additional boats on the lake, as well as adding more traffic to an already busy road.

"I would suggest fencing to keep children in," said Moore. "This would limit their access to the road. We are also concerned about privacy." Moore suggested limiting the number of sites to 50, instead of the 100 asked for.

Reeve Graham Blair noted that there is presently a serious need for traffic calming on that section of The Ridge Road. "That is on our radar," he said.

Council also received correspondence from Mike Moore, an abutting landowner, objecting to the proposal. He asked for 1100 feet fencing of a type to be approved by himself, to separate campers from other private property, as well as having the property line for the fence surveyed.

A third resident, Len Langsford also expressed his concerns about the loss of privacy he may suffer, and effect these changes would have on his property values.

"In this business we know that people who use campgrounds are not always there for the lake, it's more about getting away," said Morrison. "In fact, a pool is a bigger draw - it is heated, controlled, has no weeds or fish or bugs. The KOA campground in Marmora has no waterfront - just a pool. Most people who use a campground, don't have a boat."

"Adding to boat traffic on the lake?" said Deputy Reeve Marilyn Brickles. "The statistics show that only five per cent of campers have boats. It is difficult for seasonal campers on a small budget. The cottages seem to have two or three boats each. If we are concerned, why do we have a public boat launch?"

"Boat traffic is in decline on the lake (Wollaston Lake)," said Councillor Bob Ireland.

"A major concern of ours, is the environmental impact we have on a lake that is already at capacity," said Morrison. "We will be installing for the first time on this site a proper septic system that will be inspected and approved by the Ministry of the Environment."

"That is my biggest worry, and has the biggest impact on the lake," said Ireland. "That trumps everything else."

"Over the years, campgrounds have been hastily developed," said Frank Mills, Wollaston Township chief building officer. "There are barrels in the ground, and even worse. This has a major positive impact, and is a big gain for us - things like sewage treatment coming up to the way they should be."

Further discussion revolved around possible methods to improve the traffic problems on The Ridge Road in the neighbourhood of Wollaston Lake.

?You can't discourage growth,? said Councillor Lynn Kruger. ?People don't like change... especially if it is around them. Maybe the neighbours could chip in on a fence, or build it themselves. There has to be a reason for people to come to Coe Hill. Otherwise we will have a ghost town.?

?Lots of people here started out as tourists,? said Morrison. ?We started out as campers at Red Eagle, now we are residents and business owners. We are here to support the town. The township needs the economy .. it is what keeps our gas station, or restaurants open. But I need to know what is going to happen, so I don't feel like I am on the road to nowhere. I have tried to do everything by the book.?

?What if you don't get 100 sites?? asked Ireland.

?If I don't get 100 sites .. I won't be able to go ahead, to be honest,? said Morrison. ?My business plan depends on that. My budget doesn't have another \$25,000 or more to spend in surveys and fencing. Mike Moore has a legitimate concern right now, and I am willing to talk .. but he is asking for a lot.?

?The impact on property values already existed,? noted Blair.

?We want to develop the back woods area, not the waterfront. That's what you are looking for, aren't you?? said Morrison. ?Parents want to get their kids away from their phones. We plan trails for walking, a fenced dog walking area, we have lots of green space.?

Morrison also noted that installation of a pool on site is seriously on their minds, but not part of the current phase of their business plan.

Council decided not to make any alterations to the proposed zoning changes and site plan, and to return them to the agenda for the next regular meeting on March 10 for approval. Abutting landowners will be notified.