

City

Wetland defenders lose bid in fight against subdivision

By Doug Yonson
Citizen regional bureau

For the fifth time in a year, environmental groups are fighting local politicians to protect an important Ottawa-Carleton wetland from development.

The issue this time involves a 34-lot country estate development on 132 acres in the environmentally sensitive Carp Hills north of Carp.

The region's planning committee Tuesday rejected the pleas of three environmental groups and its own staff and approved the plan to subdivide the property, which is adjacent to an ecologically vulnerable land.

The Carp Hills is a ridge of wetland, Precambrian shield rock and forest identified by the region as an area worthy of environmental protection. Among other things, it is rich in aquatic and plant life, herons and deer.

Since 1978 the region has acquired one-sixth of the 8,500 acres.

In the latest dispute, regional staff recommended the region also purchase the 132 acres. They feared the subdivision is incompatible with the area and would lead to pressure for further development, "the cumulative impact of which

would be significant and irreversible."

In case a purchase could not be negotiated, it also recommended the draft plan of subdivision be referred to the Ontario Municipal Board for approval or rejection.

The owner, Joan Fields, has been trying to develop the land since 1987.

The Wetlands Preservation Group of West Carleton, the Ottawa Field Naturalists Club, and Ecovision, a coalition of environmental groups, supported the staff recommendations.

"Allowing this development will degrade areas we feel deserve protection along the Carp Ridge," Michael Murphy of the field naturalists told the committee. He said the development does not conform to the official plans of the region or West Carleton.

The plan should be rejected because it "plops a subdivision in the middle of ecologically sensitive

areas," said Ted Glass of Ecovision. But Fields's lawyer, James McIninch, said Fields has made several compromises to address environmental concerns and the plan now meets the requirements of both official plans. The owner has agreed to deed the 40 most sensitive acres to the region.

Although regional staff said the proposals now comply with the two official plans, they still felt the region should protect the land from development forever by buying it.

But the planning committee refused to refer the plan to the OMB, or to consider spending the estimated \$300,000 to buy the land. It agreed unanimously that the controls placed on the development will adequately protect the environment in the area.

"The development complies with the official plan," said Ottawa Coun. Jamie Fisher. "In my view, the natural environment aspects are well preserved by keeping it under private ownership."

Murphy conceded that the development controls "are better than nothing," but said they only reduce, rather than eliminate, the impacts of development.

The decision is to be reviewed by regional council tonight.



Jamie Fisher
Satisfied