



Majority favour development deal

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Published on Feb 03, 2009

A deal backed by council for developing the former Lafarge lands will save money by shortening the length of an Ontario Municipal Board hearing, says Mayor Karen Farbridge.

“At the very least we’ll be able to reduce the length of the hearing, which will reduce the cost of the hearing to taxpayers,” Farbridge said Monday.

“What was scheduled as a 40-day hearing is now a 15-day hearing,” she said, because of a deal approved by the developer, the city and the Howitt Park Residents’ Association.

A fourth party, Armel Corp., is still against the deal mediated by the OMB, because of the impact it could have on Armel’s West Hills commercial development in the west end. Armel “excluded themselves” from the OMB’s mediation process, Farbridge said in an interview. “It was their choice not to participate as fully as they could have.”

As for the deal’s effect on West Hills, Farbridge said it will be up to the OMB to weigh the evidence of planners for various parties at the upcoming OMB hearing, which is set to start March 2.

The mediated deal cuts the amount of retail space that Silvercreek (Guelph) Developments Ltd. can build on the 54-acre former quarry site, and it adds some other uses. Key components, the city says, include:

- A main street area for restaurants and other services along Silvercreek Parkway between Paisley and Wellington streets
- A business park, residential community and park on the east side of Silvercreek Parkway
- Retail/commercial uses on the west side of Silvercreek on lands bounded by the Hanlon Expressway.

“I think it’s the multi-use aspect and the urban design that really sets it apart from what we had received earlier,” Farbridge said of the deal.

The proposed deal would allow development on an underused brownfield site that’s been a “difficult site for development,” she said, given the triangular site’s location between railway tracks and the Hanlon Expressway. She said the cost of an underpass beneath the CN line south of Paisley that’s needed to extend Silvercreek Parkway will be shared between the developer and the city, with the city’s share to come from development charges.

Hopes weren’t high for the OMB’s mediation process, Farbridge said. “I think we’re really impressed with how hard everybody worked on it, and there was a lot of give on all sides,” she said. She particularly commended representatives of the Howitt Park Residents’ Association.



This sketch of the new concept for developing the former Lafarge lands shows commercial buildings, in red, on the west side of Silvercreek Parkway, which is extended through the site. Seven service commercial buildings are shown in blue. The plan also includes a business park, residential buildings and a city park on the east side of Silvercreek, along with a ring road.

The association, which has almost 100 members, voted 61 to three in favour of the deal on Thursday, said association president Ron Foley.

The deal aims to keep all of the large-format (sometimes called big box) retail development to the west of Silvercreek Parkway. These stores will include one 145,000-sq.-ft. "warehouse membership club" or "home improvement retail warehouse" store, as well as four 25,000-sq.-ft. retail buildings to be phased in later.

Several service commercial buildings totalling 42,000 square feet are to go east of Silvercreek, with a ring road around them. These buildings will be at least two storeys, with offices or residential units on the top floor. The deal also includes land to be zoned for high-density residential, a business park and land that could be used for affordable housing.

"You end up with a live-work community," Foley said in an interview Monday.

A city park just east of the ring road will provide public access to open space to the east of Howitt Creek, he said.

As for the traffic worries of residents in the neighbourhood, Foley said the association has been assured by a traffic consultant that residential streets won't be affected. As for major roads including Paisley, Edinburgh and Waterloo, the consultant said they can handle the additional traffic, he said. The deal calls for the intersection of Silvercreek and Waterloo to be realigned eventually, he noted.

Coun. June Hofland, who declared a conflict of interest because she lives in the neighbourhood and who didn't take part in council discussions of the issue, said the main reason she supports the deal is that the development now won't be just a retail power centre. "We have come a long, long way from the original plan" proposed in November 2005, she said.

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