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No end in sight for boundary dispute

It seems like Barrie and Innisfil may never see eye to eye on the valuable land that straddles their borders.

Eighteen months after formal land negotiations between the City of Barrie and the Town of Innisfil began, talks appear to have broken off for good. Last week, provincial facilitator Allan Wells presented both sides with a proposed settlement, which Innisfil officials walked away from two days later. Both sides had two completely different objectives throughout the talks, and now each side blames the other for letting the deal fall through.

According to the town, the deal was unfairly balanced in Barrie's favour. And that may have been true, since Barrie officials have suggested support for Wells' compromise.

Had Innisfil accepted the deal, it would have apparently impeded the expansion of the Highway 400 corridor, while also failing to provide adequate land and service levels. Barrie, by contrast, would have received significant land, which it needs for residential and employment development.

The town's main concern heading into the negotiations was support for developing the Innisfil Heights industrial area, while also attempting to keep as much land along its northern boundary as possible. There are obvious reasons for this. Quite simply, the more industry and land in Innisfil, the more taxes can be generated.



Comment

by Chris Simon

But a long term fight is probably balanced in Barrie's favour. Over the next 25 years, Simcoe County's population is expected to grow from about 438,700 to 667,400, according to a report released by the Hemson Consulting company last year.

Of that, Barrie's population will climb from 133,500 residents to 175,000, while Innisfil's will also jump by several thousand.

However, Barrie is expected to run out of developable lands within the next decade. Coupled with the province's Places to Grow document, which named Barrie as the preferred place for future urban development in Southern Simcoe County, Innisfil is being backed into a corner. Expansion into Innisfil appears to be favoured by the province, and Barrie officials seem to know it. It's hard for Innisfil officials to negotiate a fair deal under those terms.

Innisfil now says it will await the finalization of the county's growth plan process, which will determine how the anticipated population spike will be handled, before deciding on another course of action. That process is expected to be complete by June. However, provincial

legislation overrules county bylaws, meaning the Ontario government has the final OK on growth in this region.

All levels of government are failing to look at the long-term impact that this uncompromising stubbornness will have on their residents. Resolving a land and servicing dispute shouldn't be about winning, but rather about ensuring the best interest of all residents in the region. Decisions should focus on providing the best services possible for residents of both municipalities, in the most cost-effective way.

Barrie obviously needs more land to grow, and it has the well-developed and relatively cheap infrastructure to meet demands, should it acquire more land from Innisfil.

But Innisfil's economic viability cannot be discounted either. The expansion of the Highway 400 corridor will bring thousands of jobs to the region, many of which will inevitably be consumed by Barrie residents. It's in their best interest to ensure Innisfil gets a fair deal.

If Barrie shows support for 400 development by meeting Innisfil's service level requirements, it might just pressure the province into accepting the Innisfil Heights proposal quickly.

Regardless of which municipality ultimately wins this battle, it's bound to cost plenty more time and money. It could be years before a long-term agreement is finalized. Too bad residents of both municipalities will be left in uncertainty, waiting for answers in the meantime.

Someone needs to pay for rec centre mistakes

Letters From Our Readers

I just read, and also received notice in my property tax bill that the new town offices will be open and occupied the first week in March.

Isn't it wonderful that the barn's new spacious offices will soon be occupied by our elected officials, while the rec centre that was to do so much for this town in nowhere near completion.

Although the second, smaller rink has finally opened, I question why it is

still so far behind. I am aware of labour issues, and unexpected costs and delays. I have been to the rec centre and have seen how much more there is to complete. The original date given to open the facility was a joke, anyone could see how much there was to be done, and no member of council could have possibly expected dates of late 2007 to open. In fact, now they are telling us that the soccer and baseball fields will probably not be able to be used this summer as well. Who planned all of this?

Someone really dropped the ball on this project, and

has no doubt increased the costs dramatically to correct and get the job back on schedule. Furthermore, community groups, like Innisfil Minor Hockey, and figure skating clubs were promised ice time back in November.

Some groups were even pressured into booking times, and then when the ice was not ready they had to scramble to find ice. By then, Stroud, Lefroy and other arenas had already sold ice time, and had contracts to honour.

As of late, council members have been tackling the annual budget for this

town, and of course want to increase property taxes, although it "pains them to do so."

But quite honestly what choice do they have?

Someone has to pay for mistakes, and unexpected costs. Also, the running of the new offices and rec centre (whenever that will be), will be costly. So why not give raises, buy some new trucks and equipment, and then raise our taxes again?

It seems understandable, right?

Since I will be helping to pay for salaries, the rec centre's cost and

maintenance, and also that of the new offices, I just have one request for our councillors. In the interest of saving energy and money out of the tax payers' pockets, turn off the lights. Anytime I have driven by the barn, day or night, there is not a soul in the place but every light is on. I can see some outdoor lights being left on for safety purposes.

But for every light inside and out to be on all the time, even my six and seven-year-old children know how to turn off lights when they are not in the room.

Sandra Hartman,
Innisfil

Snow men helped out

Letters From Our Readers

I felt compelled to write to the paper in regards to our last big snowstorm.

We awoke to yet another snow day, not an uncommon occurrence around this area. My whole family would be at home (Thursday). My husband and son attempted to shovel us out of the driveway and our good old trusty shovel broke. We all went back to bed to be awoken by the sound of many snowblowers. I looked outside and there was

someone blowing us out, and I looked down the street to see about five or six men doing the same thing all the way down our road. It was a real sense of community. It made me feel good that people, some that I had never even met, decided to take the time to help out neighbours. My daughter said how nice it was that they would take the time to help us out and said that she was going to take her own money and go pay them for their help. I told her it was up to her. Off she went plunging through the snow. I watched from the window. Of course, the man did not

accept her offer, but she came in with a big smile and asked me why someone would help and not accept payment.

It gave me a chance to explain that sometimes people do things out of the goodness of their heart and they don't expect something in return.

She was proud of those people, and I was grateful to them. It taught my daughter a great lesson in life. Thanks to all the guys who decided to take the time to help out your neighbours on Forest Street.

Bonnie Mitchell,
Innisfil

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