

Orchard Park/Sherwood Forest Ratepayers' meeting, Sherwood Forest Public School

Nov 24, 2011

Sandy Levin opened the meeting by reviewing the agenda and introducing guests from the Attawandaron Ratepayers Association, and William Pol from Fanshawe College. Councillor Nancy Branscombe joined the meeting as did school trustees Peggy Sattler and Joyce Bennett (vice-chair of the Board).

SHERWOOD FOREST SCHOOL SITE

Sandy gave history of the pending school closing. He also referenced two meetings held in the neighbourhood to discuss options for the school property since the Board of Education made the decision to close the school. The minutes of the meetings will be posted to the web site and sent out to the mailing list (as requested). Sandy outlined the continuum of options from least cost and control to most cost and control. The continuum appeared on the November newsletter that went out to the community and appears on the Ratepayers' website (<http://orchardparksherwoodforestratepayers.ca/>)

Options include (from least cost and control to most cost and control):

- Do nothing and wait and see what a purchaser of the site proposes
- Actively search for new tenants (e.g. private schools, community groups)
- Lobby the City to purchase the site and retain some green space (city staff have not been interested in recommending such action to date)
- Use the local improvement process to provide funding for the city to acquire the site. This process would require some work as it has not been done for park acquisition. It would involve all residents in the area. A charge is applied to the property tax bill of all benefiting property owners until the works are paid for (usually 10 years). Defining the benefiting properties would require discussions with the city
- Soliciting donations to buy the property, probably by the city. Donations to the city are tax deductible
- Forming a limited liability partnership, company, or co-op to buy the property and use the school building to run programs or to sever part of the property to pay back some of the costs

There are also hybrid options such as a company formed by the residents buying the property using invested funds as well as funds donated to the city (which can issue tax receipts)

There was a good discussion and questions asked about the proposals, particularly the idea of a local improvement or a limited partnership. In general, few people wanted to do nothing and let events take their course (school board sell the property, a developer buy and rezone it, and live with what comes).

The majority of people attending the meeting wanted options investigated and reported back in some detail at the May AGM.

Questions included:

Seeing if the board would sell land to abutting land owners for larger lots. (Not sure at this point how many of the abutting owners are interested)

Find out who would be considering buying the site to work with them to retain some green space.

Once the purchaser is known, see if that person/company would sell some lots (either to the city or to interested residents) to retain a park space that would be deeded to the city.

It would be costly to buy the site and maintain the school profitably.

Would the city consider buying the site, retain some green space and sell the rest? (Nancy Branscombe pointed out that it would require a majority of council to agree to such an arrangement)

How would a local improvement work? It was pointed out that doing so for a park acquisition has never been tried.

A question was asked about corporate sponsorships (it is unknown if a corporation would be interested in sponsoring a private park like the other Saturn parks in the city which has helped to pay for playground equipment).

How much would people have to invest in the limited partnership (depends on the number of investors)? What would happen to shares if you moved?

Conclusion

There was a straw poll taken that indicated many people were interested in getting more information for May.

Councillor Branscombe also supported working on parallel tracks including continuing to work with city staff. Sandy asked for people who would be willing to help out the working group to explore options contact him.

FANSHAWE STUDENT PROJECT

William Pol, a professor at Fanshawe College and resident of the neighbourhood, spoke to ask the community if it would support having Sherwood Forest P.S. site as a Fanshawe College student project to look at what might be done with the property. He is working with the school board and has approval to use sites like Sherwood which have been declared surplus for this student project. The Fanshawe College student project will start in February 2012. There was a round of applause for the idea. William will contact Sandy who will keep the neighbourhood informed and involved as the project rolls out.

BRESCIA SITE

An update on the situation at Brescia was given. It was reported that the city staff report on the change in land use will go to a committee of City Council, likely in January 2012. It is unclear at this time if Brescia will accept the compromise proposal raised by the City's Planner. The nearby residents are willing to have the corner of Ramsay and Brescia Lane used for parking with adequate buffering, but are opposed to seeing the land use on the rest of the site changed at this time, as it could drive down land values and result in additional absentee landlords buying properties. Current minutes of discussions on this matter will be posted to the Ratepayers' web site.

ORCHARD PARK SCHOOL BOUNDARY REVIEW, PRESENTATION BY PARENT COUNCIL

Trustees Sattler (our representative) and Bennett (who chaired the ARC and is vice chair of the Board) entered the meeting

A presentation was made by the Orchard Park School parent council to give the community information about the fast track boundary review process that the Thames Valley District School Board has recently started. The presentation will be posted to the Ratepayers' web site. Among the concerns raised are that the process appears to exclude the community; has incomplete data and incomplete or incorrect data analysis; the process is being rushed; comes on the heels of the decision to close Sherwood Forest PS when the idea of including Eagle Heights in the ARC was not given consideration by the administrator leading the ARC. It was also of concern that information about the process was not shared with the wider community – it was only communicated to parents through notes home from students and that replies are to be sent to schools through the students bringing them. How students at Orchard Park P.S. would be affected during construction was raised as an issue as well and the impact of additional school bus traffic on Wychwood, as well as the actual cost of such work.

There were many questions asked of the presenter and the trustees:

- The trustees indicated that this was an administrative process not a board process.
- Trustee Sattler indicated none of the trustees were at the first meeting of this boundary review but that she intends to attend the next one, albeit, she will be arriving late (Nov 28, 6:30 pm, Eagle Heights). She also indicated that she would talk to the Director of Education now that she had heard the concerns from the community.
- Neither trustee, when asked, would agree to move a motion to reconsider the decision to close Sherwood.
- When Trustee Sattler was asked how many students she would like to see at Orchard Park, she responded 300-350.

Conclusion

Those attending were given a sheet with contact information for the trustees. The community was invited to attend and present at the November 28th meeting at Eagle Heights School at 6:30 pm.