



All six members of the planning committee present voted to reject the staff recommendation and deny the official plan and zoning amendments for this Dundas property.

## **Committee rejects storage application**

### **RBG concerns raise more questions about proposal**

Dundas Star News  
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Published on Feb 20, 2009

City councilors on the planning and economic development committee questioned the completeness and accuracy of a staff report that recommends official plan and zoning amendments to permit a self-serve storage facility in Dundas as they unanimously rejected it this week.

It's not yet clear if Doug Hammond, owner of 201 King St. E., will appeal the decision to the Ontario Municipal Board. After Tuesday's meeting, Mr. Hammond's planner Ken Dakin noted the decision must be confirmed by the full city council. But he left the door open to an appeal.

Following an overview of the plan for four storage buildings and city staff's recommendation to support necessary zoning and official plan changes, several committee members quickly showed where they stood. Councillor Brad Clark noted the proponent's argument of minimal impact on the surrounding environment was not supported by local experts, including the Bay Area Restoration Council and Royal Botanical Gardens.

"Their concerns don't balance with what your consultants are telling your client," Mr. Clark said.

Councillor Brian McHattie said the RBG's concerns about the plan also raised questions for him.

"It seems to me if you're taking an environment-first attitude, you wouldn't build there," Mr. McHattie said. "Cootes Paradise has greater biodiversity than any national park. When turtles leave the marsh, this (property) is the first place they go. I'm struggling with your ecological analysis."

The RBG letter, signed by aquatic ecologist Thys Theysmeyer and CEO Mark Runciman, was given to councillors just a couple of hours before the meeting.

It raised 13 specific concerns with the planning staff report including impact on stormwater management, habitat protection, protection of endangered turtles, human behaviour and floodplain mapping errors. It also questioned the Hamilton Conservation Authority staff's technical assessment.

The RBG letter suggests possible errors in floodplain mapping that should be reviewed, and expresses concern over the onus on its own organization to maintain flood protection.

A small cross-section of 13 speakers represented more than 1,557 letters from people opposed to the plan.

“We are here today because the ball was dropped at every stage,” said Penelope Hill. “The RBG should have been active from the beginning. The ball was dropped.”

Ms. Hill wondered why no staff member reviewing the proposal considered off-site impacts of the proposal.

Former Hamilton Conservation Authority Chair Ben Vanderbrug spoke about the free report produced by a Toronto planning firm recommending council reject the self-serve storage proposal and consider a Cootesarea ecopark that would include the subject site.

“We felt we needed to articulate this with more than emotional words,” Mr. Vanderbrug said. “Your decision today will have a profound impact on the livability of this city.”

Jim McDonald pointed not only to widespread public opposition, but concerns and opposition expressed by Dundas Community Council, Dundas Councillor Russ Powers, the Cootes to Escarpment Land Management Plan –which suggests the site should be in public hands, the Hamilton Conservation Authority advisory committee and full HCA board. And he noted the conservation authority’s purchase of the nearby Veldhuis Greenhouse property with the intent of naturalizing it.

“City management should not now turn around and allow construction of a storage facility,” Mr. McDonald said. “True leadership means setting a new direction.”

Dundas resident and University of Toronto vegetation ecologist Terry Carleton said the city planning staff report takes a “microscopic view” of the property despite the fact it is surrounded by public lands currently being rehabilitated.

“It was a wetland before fill was placed,” Mr. Carleton said. “We, as humans, have degraded the property.”

Mr. Carleton asked the committee to reject the plan, and suggested the possibility of a land swap with Mr. Hammond.

Steve Grzenda, an Ancaster-based developer who has built storage facilities himself, questioned the staff recommendation to change the zoning to commercial for a storage business, noting his understanding is such operations are only permitted on industrial land, and he’s always sought out industrial zoned land for storage facilities.

“I’m not for it. I’d recommend it not go forward,” Mr. Grzenda said.

Ken Hall, former chair of the Bay Area Restoration Council and Hamilton Harbour Remedial Action Plan said much of the work today is about correcting mistakes made in the past, costing the community millions of dollars.

“As we step forward, don’t make more mistakes that we have to correct in the future,” Mr. Hall said. “We shouldn’t be doing anything that looks like a backward step.”

Councillor Clark wasted no time introducing a motion to overturn the staff recommendation and refuse the applications. The motion was seconded by Councillor Scott Duvall. Councillor Dave Mitchell suggested staff should have paid more attention to the former Town of Dundas official plan, and its intention for the property.

"It should have been investigated a little further," Mr. Mitchell said.

All six members of the planning committee present voted to reject the staff recommendation and deny the official plan and zoning amendments.

Mr. Whitehead and Mr. McHattie were absent for the vote.

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