

Harbour plan won't float, so talks begin

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Presentation of a west harbour redevelopment plan to city council is being delayed while the Chamber of Commerce, Waterfront Trust and senior city staff try to broker changes that make it acceptable to as many waterfront interests as possible.

The plan was scheduled to go to committee of the whole Monday, but Jill Stephen, acting director of strategic planning and rapid transit, now says that won't happen until January or February.

It's a significant issue because the aim is to create new retail and entertainment opportunities at the foot of James Street, replace all existing docks, move winter boat storage and encourage new waterfront investment.

Whatever council eventually adopts will become part of the city's official plan, a legal blueprint for the future.

But the latest proposals to come out of four years work and spending of more than \$700,000 were criticized for threatening two existing businesses, MacDonald Marine Services and Brewers' Marine Supply, while disrupting the Royal Hamilton Yacht Club (RHYC), Leander Boat Club and other operations renting space from the city. Some North End residents continue to question the need for any major changes.

Chamber of commerce chief executive officer John Dolbec said his organization, which moved to the RHYC building years ago, wants to help achieve as much consensus as possible, to come up with a plan "all stakeholders can more or less agree to," before it goes to council.

While area residents might not be fully satisfied about traffic concerns and the boat clubs might still object to specific features, "we want something with which the broader group is reasonably content."

To that end, Dolbec said, the chamber asked city manager Chris Murray to arrange a day-long workshop run by the Hamilton Waterfront Trust.

After listening to all parties, Stephen's staff is now considering what changes can be brought to a second, yet-unscheduled, stakeholders meeting.

Stephen said, "If we can get them to agree to 95 per cent and that overall it's a good plan, that's a success."

City staff first engaged consultants whose proposals met with widespread objection.

The Waterfront Trust, meanwhile, produced its own scheme, and council directed staff to use it as the basis for their work. But that also ran into trouble in recent months, prompting the 11th-hour bid to find agreement.

Dolbec says, "There's no compelling reason to displace MacDonald Marine," and that mistreating private business now will discourage future investment.

Laurel Thompson, past commodore of the RHYC, says she is very optimistic that differences can be resolved "and that all partners can come together, as much as possible, on one plan."

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