



Nearly an Acre of Mississauga Forest to be Preserved by Developer ***By Therese Taylor***

From the beginning, nearly everyone said it was a done deal. From the ward councillor to a lawyer to the Mayor of Mississauga, nothing could be done to save a one-hectare woodland, they said. With a flight path directly above, a major road that stretched for miles with no other forest to speak of, a huge rolling landfill site close on the forest's heels, childhood asthma on the rise and 1800 premature deaths attributed to bad air by the Ontario Medical Association, this didn't make sense. As long as the mature trees, more than 400 of them, had not been severed from their roots, I couldn't accept that nothing could be done to save these oxygen producing, carbon sequestering trees, many of them from the rare Shagbark Hickory family.

The city claimed through a botanical report prepared and paid for by the developer that the forest was in poor condition and not worthy of saving, though that was not even the report's conclusions. A call to the International Society of Arboriculture provided the name of urban forestry consultant Philip van Wassenaer. He confirmed that the forest was indeed worth preserving and later prepared a report on its condition.

The community rallied and 373 signatures were gathered on a petition in 2 1/2 days leading up to a deputation made before City Council.

Council had already approved in principle the application to amend the Official Plan to delete the "Natural Area" classification of the forest, allowing for the clear cutting of the majority of trees. Surely "approved in principle," meant there was wiggle room for the municipality to change its collective mind, I naively thought. The mayor had said at a public meeting that "she did not wish the woodlot to be destroyed and requested that she be provided a copy of the report that recommends that it not be preserved...She further stressed that she did not wish the trees preserved, but that the woodlot be preserved." Indeed, there was no report that said the "woodlot" should not be preserved. No follow up. No Environmental Assessment.

This came to light after the deputation, after the Mayor told us that the only way to save the forest was to purchase it ourselves. Though 1 1/2 acres of the forest had been purchased for \$650,000 in 2000, a bargain for a municipality with \$630 million in reserves, it seemed unlikely that the developer, with city council at his side would sell, even if the community was able to raise the money.

Treesavers, a small community group was thus formed to determine what could be done to prevent the destruction of this mature forest, 60- 75 years old in van Wassenaer's estimation. With advice of staff from Evergreen Common Grounds, 3 meetings were arranged, first with the Mayor, then with the ward Councillor and a representative of the property owner and finally with the owner himself.

When council finally approved the rezoning application, the site plan included a tree preservation area that represented about 1/4 of the forest. With a firm belief that our environment is going to hell in a handbasket, I continued to lobby the landowner and the developer, hoping to persuade them to save at least half the forest. Only one of the other members of Treesavers, Susan Karranadjas, shared my view and together we appealed the by-laws.

Subsequent negotiations with the landowner proved fruitful and he agreed to redesign the townhouse complex and preserve nearly an acre (.86) of the forest. A settlement agreement ratified by the OMB provided a rectangular, contiguous tree preservation area stretching from Killaby Road to Britannia. In a letter of opinion, van Wassenaer commented that the enlarged, contiguous strip of forest "is preferable to the originally proposed Tree Preservation Plan" passed by the by-laws, which allowed for two smaller tree preservation areas, together about one half acre in total. "Ecologically, this configuration is preferable as it provides one continuous forest block with considerably less edge than the previous configuration," he stated. Van Wassenaer, who also gave evidence at the hearing said, "Considering the whole forest was slated for removal and approved I think this is really something. I have not seen something like this happen before."

Though Fitzwood Investments and their parent company H&R Development deserve to be commended for making serious concessions, the lack of leadership by Mississauga City Council and the Mayor, especially in light of her comments at the public meeting, is distressing. Municipal budgets need to enlarge the funds dedicated to purchasing and managing our remaining treasury of forests. Until such time as elected officials wake up and smell the toxins, more people need to stand up for them. If you would like to share your views about this case or have questions, contact Therese Taylor at tmtaylor@idirect.ca