

Public to hear final details of condo plans

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A public meeting to unveil the final plans for a controversial waterfront development in Pierrefonds will be held next month, but local environmentalists say the consultation is a meaningless and empty gesture.

"It will be a public consultation to tell us what is, in fact, a fait accompli," said David Fletcher, vice-president of the Green Coalition. "I don't think we'll have any real input."

Still, conservationists plan to show up en masse at the meeting on Nov. 20, in the hopes of showing the borough their strong opposition to the plan.

A condo development with about 300 units is slated to be built on the natural shoreline across from the Cheval Blanc rapids by Montreal developer Grilli Immobilier Inc. Pierrefonds councillor Bert Ward said the most recent plan he's seen has included single homes, four-storey buildings and two 10-storey towers.

"But we are trying to preserve the riverbanks as much as possible," said Ward. "This meeting is a public consultation where people can make comments about the project. Then, we'll see if the developer has to make modifications to his project, such as the number of trees to be preserved."

But Fletcher said no matter how much the developer downsizes the project, which was originally going to be more than 600 units, the Green Coalition is strongly opposed to any development in the area, which is considered a biologically diverse eco-territory.

"We've got to make sure this development doesn't proceed," Fletcher said. "It's ethically, legally and politically wrong - not to mention environmentally."

Fletcher said a December 2005 Quebec cabinet decree prohibits the sale or swap of publicly owned eco-territory lands on the island of Montreal. The list of protected lands includes the Cheval Blanc rapids, yet a swap was approved by the city of Montreal in May.

At that time, the borough of Pierrefonds handed over the seven-hectare parcel Grilli is now trying to develop. In exchange, Grilli gave Pierrefonds a seven-hectare parcel of land it owned in a protected flood plain farther west and where no building is allowed.

The Green Coalition has filed a complaint about the land swap with the Montreal ombudsman to investigate the legitimacy of the land exchange that is allowing the development to proceed. There has been no response from the ombudsman, but Fletcher said he's encouraged that the complaint is still being investigated.

He also said that on Aug. 31, the agglomeration council voted to delete part of the Cheval Blanc lands prohibited from swap or sale from the government decree, but that that should never have been done without provincial approval. In response, the Green Coalition has also asked the Department of Municipal Affairs to look into the legality of the land swap.

"The city is fast-tracking the development plans for the protected eco-territory without any prior consultation whatsoever," Fletcher said.

But Ward said the borough has been only too happy to talk with the environmentalists and make certain changes to the project according to their recommendations.

"We've been trying as much as possible to sit down with them and see what they find acceptable," Ward said. "But there is no compromise they will accept. They are totally opposed to it."

Ward said the borough would like to have a healthy balance of preserving as much as possible of the shoreline, but still ensuring that development takes place in Pierrefonds. "The Green Coalition thinks we should have no development at all," Ward said. "But these developments create revenues."

Pierrefonds council will also be voting on another controversial land development project in November, concerning the Brook Woods across from Brook Park. Many residents in the area are opposed to the development, which will include about 31 homes.

The council is scheduled to vote on the project on Nov. 6. A public meeting to unveil the project is scheduled for Nov. 20 at 7 p.m., at Pierrefonds city hall, 13665 Pierrefonds Blvd. But the date, which has been changed twice, should be confirmed with city hall at 514-624-1124.