

Cheval Blanc project gets final go-ahead

251 housing units to be built. Pierrefonds borough mayor Worth rejects critics' complaints of lack of consultation

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A controversial waterfront development, to be built on the natural shoreline across from the Cheval Blanc rapids on Riviere des Prairies, received final approval at Pierrefonds/Roxboro borough council Monday night.

Developer Grilli Immobilier Inc. can now proceed with plans to build the 251-unit Domaine des Brises project - a mix of houses and condos priced from \$160,000 to \$450,000.

The land surrounding the housing development is to be turned into a nature park by the city of Montreal. At a public meeting at the Pierrefonds/Roxboro borough hall last month, Daniel Hodder, representing Montreal's parks department, said the nature park could be the size of Lafontaine Park.

In contrast to last month's raucous meeting where the plans were first unveiled and several people were ejected, Monday night's meeting went smoothly.

David Fletcher, vice-president of the Green Coalition, has been a vocal opponent of the project since the beginning saying it threatens a biologically diverse eco-territory. He was also concerned about a land swap that saw Pierrefonds give Grilli a seven-hectare parcel of land in 2001 that it is now going to develop, in exchange for the same size piece of land in a protected floodplain farther west where no construction is allowed. Fletcher had called the swap "worthless" and "wrong."

During the question period Monday night, he told borough mayor Monique Worth his group is disappointed the project is going ahead. He asked her to reconsider the council's procedures when looking at new development projects in western Pierrefonds.

"Can we make sure there's more transparency in the public involvement? Can we make sure this takes place in sufficient time that the public can react properly rather than being faced with a fait accompli?" Fletcher asked.

Speaking after the meeting, Worth said numerous meetings and consultations were held on this project. She pointed out that the plan started with 650 units and was reduced to 251.

"Unfortunately, the people who are not happy with this project, it's probably because they didn't want any construction at all."

Concerning Fletcher's contention that more transparency is needed in the way the public is consulted, Worth disagreed.

"No, I don't feel like we deprived them of any rights. I mean, they were here yelling and screaming at me I don't know how many times.

"I know my role and I know that I have to expect that but I don't think we can gain anything by doing that."

She added that the borough council met with the Green Coalition many times but it didn't want the council to give the go-ahead to Grilli.

"But those people were paying taxes for 10 years (on the land). What do you expect? They expect to do something with the land and they do listen to the city asking them to give us the green space for a park, so it's a win-win situation."

It's expected construction will begin this spring, while work on the park will start after the housing development's infrastructure is installed.