

Construction a go in ecoterritory

Citizens ask for more from borough council

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The final chapter of a decade-long struggle between environmentalists and politicians over a proposed residential development in a Pierrefonds ecoterritory closed this week, after the borough's council passed a bylaw to accept the plan.

By spring, the construction of 251 housing units will begin in the Rapides du Cheval Blanc ecoterritory, Pierrefonds/Roxboro borough mayor Monique Worth told residents during Monday's council meeting.

A land swap between Groupe immobilier Grilli and the borough enabled the project to move forward. The traded property acquired by Pierrefonds/Roxboro — which is primarily wetland and not developable — will be turned into a new 44-hectare municipal park, Worth said.

But for Roxboro resident Sue Stacho, the development will sit in the heart of a "beautiful" area she's frequented over the last 16 years.

An emotional Stacho said the borough has to work closer with residents in discussing future development proposals.

Pierrefonds/Roxboro's council has long been criticized by environmentalists for siding with developers' interests.

She highlighted the knowledge of local university and CEGEP students, who are studying environment-related disciplines and have offered to advise councillors in decision making.

"They've got some great ideas for these spaces and I really think it would make our city a better place if we could pool the talents of these people and work together," she told *The Chronicle* following the meeting, as she wiped tears from her eyes. "I feel like (the borough) could do more."

Stacho is not alone. For years, the project has been met with passionate opposition from citizens across Montreal. The western end of Pierrefonds/Roxboro is home to most of the island's remaining green spaces.

Roxboro resident David Fletcher of the Green Coalition — a Montreal environmentalist organization — said citizens were largely ignored.

"Our feeling is it's a project for the privileged few rather than the citizens as a whole," the Roxboro resident told council during a brief question period after the meeting.

"Can we make sure there's more transparency and public

involvement in the projects that will take place in western Pierrefonds?" Fletcher asked.

Worth said council considered residents' input during several public meetings over the years. The accepted project has been scaled back from the original proposal of 650 units in 10-storey buildings.

"I don't feel like we deprived them of any rights," she said of citizens after the meeting. "They were here yelling and screaming at me I don't know how many times. We gave them the time, unfortunately it didn't go the way they wanted."