

No sidewalks for project

By Irene Chwalkowski, The Suburban

Pierrefonds/Roxboro borough officials said no Monday night to pleas by residents to include sidewalks at the 250-unit Domaine des Brises project, saying the developer has made enough concessions to satisfy various interest groups.

"After all the meetings we've had, all the modifications the developer has made, we're not going to ask for any more," said Mayor Monique Worth of the development more commonly known as the Whitehorse Rapids project. "The plan has been approved. It will stay the way it is."

Resident Michael Labelle contends the borough has accepted a project that violates the spirit of Montreal's Pedestrian Charter, putting citizens' safety at risk in favour of protecting the economic interests of developers who would have to pay for sidewalks.

However, Worth said the decision not to have sidewalks comes after a recommendation from Montreal's Heritage Council who released a report on the project last fall.

"They made the recommendation in order to maintain the rural character of the project. There will be a big park that is part of the project. It's a natural park," she said.

Montreal's natural spaces policy requires that the Heritage council study a project and make recommendations before development occurs in an eco-territory. The council's report, issued November 1, 2006, clearly recommends that the road, which will constitute the gateway to the eco-territory and the future nature park, should remain rural in character.

Labelle says this is in direct conflict with the pedestrian charter, developed in keeping with modern North American urban planning practices.

"The charter indicates a certain thinking and philosophy about [pedestrian safety]," Labelle said to The Suburban on Monday. "Look at a day like today. It's much safer to be walking on a sidewalk covered with snow than it is on a street. People park on the street because they want their driveways cleaned and so in a school walking zone, where there are no sidewalks, kids have to walk in between the cars," he said.

Labelle said no one is prepared to pay for sidewalks, including taxpayers and promoters.

"Why am I going to cough up X number of dollars if the municipality says 'I'm OK' and not have to," said Labelle about why developers don't want to include sidewalks if they don't have to.

Other modifications to the project were made to ease its integration into the eco-territory.

"Another modification the Heritage council recommended was that the entrance to the project be made of natural stone," said borough director Jacques Chan. "The trees to be planted [in the project] have to be of the same type as the ones that are already there," added Worth.

"This project has been 10 years in the making," said borough councillor Claude Dubois during the council meeting after the Domaine des Brises projects was approved and adopted unanimously by council.

"The city of Montreal would never have developed this [land] the way it is going to be developed. The shoreline is [presently] inaccessible. There is no road. There is no parking available. We can't decide to have no development at any cost," he said.

Dubois said the changes made to the original plan are tremendous.

"We've reduced the project from 10-storey towers to four-storey buildings, from 650 units to 250. There have been an enormous amount of concessions. We created a park that does not exist," he said.

During question period, one resident said she was sad the project has been approved.

"I'm very emotional right now. I'd like to propose in the future that we residents who are deeply attached to places such as this and council work in a collaborative way so that projects like these are not sprung upon us and that things are done [in a more open manner]."

Worth replied the resident may not have been at the table in earlier meetings going back as far as 1991 concerning Whitehorse Rapids.