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Whitevale residents fight impacts of proposed Seaton development

Traffic, heritage and financing among chief concerns

PICKERING -- Residents of Whitevale say they are battling on behalf of all Pickering residents in their continued fight against the impacts of the proposed Seaton development.

A group of residents from the north Pickering village are among the last objecting parties to the long-planned Seaton development, which will add nearly 37,000 new residents to the city's existing population of 95,000 in its first phase.

"A lot of people think we're just trying to protect Whitevale, but we're trying to protect Pickering," said resident Marion Thomas, who is leading the effort. "We're trying to get the rest of Pickering to wake up and realize this will affect them too; traffic affects everyone."

The group is currently preparing for an upcoming Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) hearing that will look at planned road construction and improvements.

Ms. Thomas pointed to the lack of road widening for Steeles Avenue and the limited construction of a planned Whitevale bypass as issues. A bridge that would see the planned Whitevale Road bypass extended over Duffins Creek has been included as part of a 15- to 20-year infrastructure forecast, rather than within phase one planning.

"How can you even conceive these roads aren't going to be affected by putting in 37,000 people?" added Lloyd Thomas, who is helping his wife with the hearings, noting morning traffic backs up on other area routes such as Altona Road. "A lot of them could stand to be widened as is."

Seaton Facts

Phase one

Population: 36,992

Building units: 12,023

Employment lands developed: 80 hectares

Highlights of planned road work:

- By 2015 the first phase of the Hwy. 407 East extension is expected to be completed, and will include a six-lane divided highway running east-west between Brock Road and the planned West Durham Link, a four-lane north-south highway connecting Hwy. 407 and Hwy. 401 in Whitby.

- Realignment of Brock Road between Fifth Concession Road/Whitevale Road and Seventh Concession Road to bypass Brougham and connect with the new Brock Road/Hwy. 407 interchange located near Sideline 16.

- A new Hwy. 407 East interchange at Sideline 26.

- Transfer of Hwy. 7 from the Province to the Region in conjunction with possible widening to match planned improvements on the highway in York Region and east of Brock Road.

"If you only put in houses and sewers and ignore the roads, one of two things is going to happen," Ms. Thomas explained.

"Either we'll be mired in gridlock, or the people who move in will start screaming bloody murder and the Province or someone will have to come in and build those roads and bridges. The question is how long is it going to take, and who's going to pay?"

Catherine Rose, acting chief planner for the City of Pickering, notes that Pickering council wanted the bridge included in an earlier phase, but ultimately the decision will be left to the Region of Durham.
The residents have already completed a hearing on heritage issues, during which they objected to the construction of schools and parks within the designated heritage open space lands around the village.

"They are saying our visual barrier is now schools and parks," Ms. Thomas explained. "We would prefer it to be left as trees, nature parks and wetlands, what we have there now."

- A proposal to construct a six-lane road with high occupancy vehicle curb lanes along Whites Road/Sideline 26 from Finch Avenue to Hwy. 7 is being considered.

- Realignment of Whitevale Road/Fifth Concession as a four-lane arterial road from Brock Road to the western edge of the development.

- Extension of Rossland Road across the rail corridor to connect with Third Concession Road.

Subsequent phases

Population: 23,627

Building units: 8,560

Employment lands developed: 288 hectares

Ms. Thomas also lists funding as a concern, noting that the City and the Region of Durham may be left on the hook for expensive costs related to infrastructure upgrades not included in phase one.

"I am concerned that they will just privatize the profits and socialize the debt," Ms. Thomas explained.

"We are not against Seaton. If they put all of the plans in place at once it might work, but I think people have no idea what the effects are going to be."

The next stage of OMB hearings is set to begin in May. Servicing plans and individual development applications that will be considered are expected to go before Pickering council prior to the hearings in April.

Residents will also get a chance to view the plans during a public open house, which has yet to be scheduled.

"We're planning to have a display in City Hall at some point so residents can see all the documents and understand what exactly the proposals are," Ms. Rose said.

Should the board approve the applications, Ms. Rose estimated the issuing of building permits for the development could begin as early as 2015.