

COMMUNITY GARDEN



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It's a situation that begs for a range of hackneyed metaphors, from muddied waters to slippery slopes to being up the creek without a paddle. Basically, Kanata West development is one big, wet mess.

The controversy eddies and swirls around 725 hectares of vital floodplains surrounding what is now Scotiabank Place. When the Palladium, home of the Ottawa Senators, was built in 1996, the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) ruled that the adjacent land could not be developed. In 2000, the City of Ottawa redesignated that agricultural land as general urban land.

As construction moved forward, environmentalists argued that research into the impact of the 22 proposed projects was not sufficient. On Feb. 4, the city halted building to review the flawed flood level analysis used to obtain approval for development. Days later, the Trinity Development Group, which will turn 17 hectares of the land into big box stores, was caught dumping at their site by the CBC.

Last week, city water resource engineer Ted Cooper was in court appealing the OMB's August 2007 decision to allow Trinity to build in the area. Together with fellow engineer Darlene Conway, he testified that there were numerous, serious flaws in the environmental analysis.

Cooper was removed from the Kanata West project at the developer's request when he raised concerns about the validity of the research in 2004.

"It is a systemic flaw, in that four agencies have supposedly reviewed the key work underlying these development proposals

and they have failed to notice significant errors," says Erwin Dreesen of the Carp River Coalition (the CRC includes representatives from Greenspace Alliance, Friends of the Carp River, Ottawa Riverkeeper and the Sierra Club of Canada). "Two of the city's three civil engineers come out and say that this analysis is faulty, and the potential consequences are huge."

"This is the only place in Ontario where people are building on a floodplain," he explains. "The rest of the province has abandoned this as a really bad idea." Runoff that would previously have been absorbed in farmers' fields will run across pavement, bringing motor oil and road salt to the Carp, which eventually feeds into the Ottawa River above the drinking supply.

The issue at hand now is not whether Kanata West landowners should contribute to remediating the river, but how much. The plan proposed by the city and developers ends where the urban section of the river does. Dreesen maintains that any such proposal must incorporate the improvement of the river beyond Kanata West, downstream of Richardson Side Road. The damage control would involve dredging and reshaping sections of the river, as well as planting new trees.

"What that means is that if you are going to turn the river into a municipal drain, that work would have to continue up to the village of Carp," he says.

"We are not anti-development, and it would be foolish to try to stop Kanata West development," says Dreesen. "We say to these fellows, if you want to build here, do it the right way."

For more information and Conway's full testimony, visit www.greenspace-alliance.ca.

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