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Area Structure Plan application received for wetland area

BILL DUKE
Editor

For Strathmore residents like Tami LeMoine, the marshy areas located south of Gray Park and Strathmore Golf Course comprise a very important part of the community.

LeMoine lives adjacent to these wetlands and sees first-hand how the area functions as a natural habitat for wildlife.

However, this natural habitat may not remain preserved for much longer, as the Town of Strathmore has received an application to create an Area Structure Plan that would lead to development on both sides of Wheatland Trail.

While the Town of Strathmore owns the northern half of Storm Pond 1 (the largest of the ponds, located on the east side of Wheatland Trail), which is part of Gray Park, the southern half of the pond and the remainder of the area in question is owned by Westcreek Developments.

The application, submitted by Westcreek (a private developer based out of Calgary), calls for a two-phase development plan that would see single-detached, mixed, and medium density attached homes constructed in the area.

"It should be made very clear that this is private land," explained LeMoine. "People are under the impression that this land has been saved, especially with all the people skating at Gray Park this winter."

As someone who owns property adjacent to the proposed development, LeMoine received a letter this July 25 from Town Planner Jennifer Brown explaining the plan.

While LeMoine appreciates the straightforward and informative responses she has received from Brown regarding the application, she is outraged at the thought of losing such an important ecologi-



BILL DUKE PHOTO

The majority of the marshy area along Wheatland Trail known as the wetlands is owned by Westcreek Developments.

cal area.

"Communities all over the world are going backwards in time trying to create natural space, green space," she said.

"We already have it, so why do we need to change what's working?"

According to Town of Strathmore CAO Dwight Stanford, one alternative to development would result in higher taxes for Strathmore residents.

"If the Town stopped all development in the storm pond area, they may have to purchase the land at a high price which would affect the taxes of everyone in town," explained Stanford.

Stanford also feels that the term "wetland" may not apply to the entire area.

"The majority of it is storm ponds," he explained. "Some of those areas could be classified as wetlands, but the majority of it is storm ponds."

Regardless of what the area is called, the Town is exploring alternatives that would result in a

greater portion remaining undeveloped and left in its natural state.

"Council is looking at, 'How do we preserve as much storm pond area as possible?'" said Stanford.

Resident Chris Nelson, who also lives adjacent to the area, feels that a tax increase may not be the worst thing in the world if it means preserving the habitat.

"I would definitely be willing to entertain the idea," said Nelson. "Put it to a public vote and let's see what happens. It's a wildlife area, and those are getting few and far between."

One suggested compromise would involve transplanting the three smaller storm ponds located west of Wheatland Trail to the east side, allowing for phase one of the proposal to go ahead as planned.

The east side of the area would remain mainly preserved.

While the ultimate decision still lies with council, organizations like Alberta Transportation and Alberta Environment have

been contacted for feedback regarding Westcreek's proposal.

"The (proposed) plan has gone out to several agencies for comments and review. It's been sent to various government departments," said Stanford.

However, even the thought of filling in and re-digging three storm ponds causes LeMoine to balk.

"My concern is that any disruption to habitat will affect the wildlife," she explained.

"Look at what's happened down at Highway 9 and the Trans Canada highway. The big wetland there are where the swans used to go. They don't go down there at all anymore."

A public hearing will be held sometime in the next two months regarding Westcreek's development proposal.

Anyone interested in learning the date of the hearing, once it is determined, or in obtaining further information should contact Jennifer Brown at jenniferb@strathmore.ca.

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