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NEWS

'It sounds pretty fishy': Local coalition highlights concerns about Erin wastewater plant

A two-dollar price point and misuse of land were the top concerns

By **Tabitha Wells** Orangeville Banner

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A community group is calling out what they feel is a lack of transparency around the wastewater treatment plant from the Town of Erin.

The Coalition for the West Credit River issued a press release on April 7 highlighting their concerns around the sale of the land the plant will be located on and work occurring on the property adjacent to it.

“It sounds pretty fishy,” said Judy Mabee, a member of the Coalition and president of the Belfountain Community Organization.

Her comments were in response to a [statement issued by the Town](#), which aimed to address what they called ‘rumours’ regarding the situation. Highlighted was the purchase of alleged prime-real estate land for a total sum of two dollars.

“When you pay two dollars for a piece of extremely valuable land it leads, correctly in my opinion, to the suspicion this is a quid pro-quo deal here, or this is a gift,” said environmental lawyer David Donnelly at a virtual meeting on March 27. “There is no justification or rationale whatsoever for a two-dollar purchase.”

The virtual event, which saw more than 300 people in attendance, was held to discuss the impact of the proposed treatment plant on the West Credit River Brook Trout habitat.

“If this purchase is done as some part of a development agreement, then what is the developer getting?” asked Donnelly. “To me it looks like a gift or a magic trick, neither of which are permitted by the Municipal Act.”

He added that he feels the community should be requesting a written explanation from the Mayor how the land could be purchased for the rate.

Mayor Allan Alls told the Advocate the property transfer was part of a commitment dating back to 2010 with Solmar.

“(It) is meant to expedite the building of the wastewater plant and (is) in the interest of addressing the economic and future growth of the Town,” said Alls.

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It's not just the cost of the plant that has the coalition and other members of the community concerned. The group alleges the land adjacent to the property is zoned as Greenbelt Natural Heritage System, which means non-agricultural.

According to the press release from the coalition, residents say they saw black smoke billowing from the land beginning in December, and since then, brush has been cut and burned, trees pulled out by their roots with large machinery, and land stripped and graded.

The release also noted the large machinery has caused severe damage to a Brook Trout nursery stream, which flows into the West Credit River.

According to the Town, however, the usage on the land is in line with the zoning from the town. On the town's zoning maps, the property is zoned as 'A' agricultural and EP2, permitting agricultural uses defined under the zoning bylaw.

"The work that was done on this land was by a farmer who attempted to increase the farmable acreage," said Alls. "If there is any damage done outside the farm land, then the owner will be required to remediate the land that is not within the farmable area. This is private land and there hasn't been a contravention of any town bylaws."

Other environmental concerns from the coalition include species that have been rules as at risk and would require permits for work to proceed, but have not been obtained according to the release.

They also noted concerns around whether the Town has kept commitments made in the Environmental Study Report.

"How can the Town of Erin fulfil these commitments when many of the trees and habitat for which the studies were to address have now been removed from the area?" added Mabee.

The release is the latest in local residents speaking out against the wastewater plant. Earlier this year, [a drive-by protest was held](#) by another local group, who are also planning another for this spring.

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