

Town council agrees in principle to accept land for seniors housing units

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GORE BAY—The dream of a new seniors housing complex unit in Gore Bay is getting a little closer to reality, after council agreed in principle to accept a parcel of land from the Manitoulin-Sudbury District Services Board (DSB) for the purpose of developing senior citizens housing.

“Thank you for letting us do this presentation,” Willis Campbell, member of the West End Senior’s and Support Interest Group, told members of council at a meeting. “Our group feels excited about this project. It will be very beneficial for our community. It will help keep families in Gore Bay and thus increase our tax base. It will allow our people to stay near where they have lived all their lives. That was one of the things that many stated in our survey.”

Mr. Campbell explained the group made a presentation to council in January 2011. “At that time we received a letter of support for an application for seed funding through Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) to assist in the development of a Community Development Plan for seniors housing and support services in the west of Manitoulin Island.

“Our group did receive a \$10,000 grant from CMHC,” said Mr. Campbell. “With these funds we were able to hire SHS Consulting Firm under the direction of Ed Starr. They analyzed the data that our group had gathered from 220 seniors from the West End of the Island (from Kagawong to Meldrum Bay) using a 30 page survey from CMHC.”

On September 6, 2011, the group received a needs and demands analysis for affordable seniors housing. The group completed a final business plan in February, 2012.

“Presently there is no government funding available for seniors housing, but it is our hope that we can have a completed plan ready when funding does become available,” said Mr. Campbell, who pointed out, “We have received a loan of \$10,000 to help do soil samples and draft a preliminary plan for the building.”

The group has been looking at various locations for sites for the project, the meeting was told. “Don Nelson, a civil engineer, and Ken Fogg, a draftsman, have been looking at properties to help us make the best decision possible. Each of the two sites we last looked at had had their problems; not enough space, inclines, zoning amendments required, and too far from downtown,” said Mr. Campbell.

“Initially, we thought 12 units would be the right amount, but our consultant suggested 20,” continued Mr. Campbell. As for the site location being looked at, “it is the south extension of the Bayside property on Water Street. It appears as if this property would be ideal. It is relatively flat, around one acre in size, and relatively close to downtown, with sewers and water just in front.”

Mr. Campbell told council the group will be meeting with the Manitoulin Sudbury District Services Board later this month to ask if this property might be available for this building project and inquiring whether DSB would be willing to sell the property.

As for what the group is asking of council, “DSB has advised us that we need a letter of support from the town of Gore Bay indicating that the town would be willing to accept the property in principle, should

DSB make a decision to either transfer the property or sell it to us. Should they sell the property, our group would raise the money for the land.”

“At the end of the day, who would own the building itself?” asked Councillor Wes Bentley. “Would the group own it or the town?”

Mr. Campbell explained, “it would be similar in operation to the current Millsite formula, which has been working well.”

It was pointed out that although everything is still preliminary at this point, the town could be the official owner of the building, and a non-profit board entity would be created, much the same fashion as the Millsite Seniors Apartment is structured.

Councillor Jack Clark asked what type of building would be constructed, one or two levels, and whether the units would be one or two bedroom.

The building style will be determined by the lot size and or the soil report to be done, said Mr. Campbell.

The building project would be, “assisted and supportive housing units,” said Mr. Campbell. “Initially it was thought other services would be provided like a main dining-eating area, but that has been taken out of the proposal.”

“The study done indicates there is a large group of seniors from Kagawong up to the West End of the Island and there are a lot of seniors around that would be interested in this type of housing unit,” said Mr. Campbell.

Unlike the Millsite apartments, the new structure would be one level, not multi-level and would contain 20 units, said Mr. Campbell.

“The beauty of it is that it would be on one level, otherwise it might have created a problem for some seniors,” said councillor Harry VanderWeerden. “And in this location it certainly wouldn’t be far from the downtown area.”

Later in the meeting, council considered a motion calling for the town to agree in principle to accept the parcel of land from MSDSB for the purposes of developing senior citizens housing in Gore Bay (approving the acquisition).

“Would the DSB be paying taxes on the property?” questioned Councillor Jack Clark, and council was informed this would be case, and that while everything is in the preliminary stages, once the housing unit is constructed a non-profit housing board could be created.