

HH develops plan for Bird's Creek

By Sarah Sobanski

Hastings Highlands is looking to future development in Bird's Creek.

Dillon Consulting's Ottawa office manager Rory Baksh attended council Nov. 1 with a concept plan for the Bird's Creek Forest Subdivision or the 71-hectre parcel of land west of Hwy 62 and east of Y Road, on the western side of the residential area of Mira Street to across from Enterprise Crescent.

Business owners who want to buy and develop the land have approached the municipality with increasing frequency over the past few years, said Mayor Vivian Bloom. The municipality has sold some lots already, but the county's building and planning department recommended it develop a plan before selling more.

"We bought the county forest quite a few years ago as an area to have light industrial and commercial," said Bloom. "The county said to us, before you sell any more you have to do a plan in there, because you don't want to end up giving somebody a large lot, and then somebody else down the road saying well I want this one, and ending up with a small lot in between that's not big enough for anybody."

Planning, building and development clerk for Hastings Highlands Cathy Bujas told *Bancroft This Week*, "We need to have a concept plan moving forward before we can really do anything."

Dillon Consulting is the same company that prepared the 2015 Bird's Creek Secondary Plan. It identified the area for potential development. The new concept plan is for rural industrial land uses.

"It would be similar to what's on the other side of Y Road," said Bujas, noting storage units and lumber and works yards as examples. "It'd be more like a light industrial area where people want larger lots than just an acre - all of the lots are [around] between five and 10 acres."

The plan has 14 lots which, Baksh said, was good in case businesses wanted to expand over time. There is an inner road for access away from public roads or the residential areas. Larger lots are near the residential areas to "allow for a buffer between residential and industrial use." Space was also left for development of "a swale for overland flow and drain site," according to the plan.

The parcel also has an environmentally sensitive area with a 120-metre buffer to other lots around it.

"There's actually a little lake and a marshy area in there," said Bloom, noting it will remain the municipality's property but presents unique infrastructure opportunities.

She added, "At one time, someone was hoping to put up almost a small hotel and conference centre in there. They were saying that area would be great to put in raised walking paths."

The municipality would have to develop a road for access to lots at the back of the property, said Bloom, but otherwise would leave the lots as is for developers to clear and build.

The plan has been drawn up, but, the mayor and planning clerk suggested that doesn't mean businesses will pop up overnight. Bloom said the municipality is open to any time frame for development to begin once the plan is approved by the county. Bujas said county approval could take time.

"If [council] wants to move forward we have to go through the planning act process, so it would have to go through the county and do a subdivision plan," said Bujas. "But we need to have a concept of what the overall vision would be moving forward."