

Public Meeting Minutes
Oil Springs Heritage Conservation District Plan
September 14, 2010, 7 p.m.
Oil Springs Youth Centre

A public meeting was held pursuant to Section 41.1(6) of the Ontario Heritage Act on September 14, 2010, at 7 p.m. at the Oil Springs Youth Centre to receive comments and questions regarding the proposed Oil Springs Heritage Conservation District Plan. Forty-three (43) persons were in attendance.

Dave Posliff (DP), Manager of Planning and Development Services, County of Lambton, provided an introduction to the process and reviewed how the community came to pursue a Heritage Conservation District Plan for the Oil Heritage area. He recognized members of the Steering Committee in attendance as well as Paul King, Ministry of Culture. He then introduced Wendy Shearer, MHBC Planning.

Wendy Shearer (WS) introduced the consulting team and provided further background on the study and plan.

The overall approach has always been to blend the need to preserve these valuable heritage resources with the need for the oil producers to carry on their businesses in a timely and effective manner. The proposed plan clearly recognizes this as a working oil field.

She reviewed the objectives of the plan and noted that the first step is to set up the boundaries of the proposed district.

The heritage attributes of the area were reviewed:

- A comprehensive production system
- A small number of property owners
- An extensive collection of historical equipment
- The development of the oil field shaped transportation systems in the area
- Interaction with natural landscapes in the area, such as the Black Creek corridor

WS explained that there are relatively few property owners in the district - only 6 main oil producers compared to a typical residential district.

Resources within the proposed district have been divided into 3 main levels in the plan, with Level 1 resources having the highest priority for preservation and Level 3 having the lowest priority.

There are also archaeological sites, which are important, especially if they are "pre-technology" era.

WS reviewed the discussion held at the steering committee level regarding options for setting the boundary of the proposed district. These included following the boundaries of the oil pool/resource, including areas of the Village such as the downtown area that were part of the oil boom development, and the approach that was settled upon, including noting areas such as Plank Road and Petrolia that "contributed" to the area and its oil history but will not form part of the legally designated district at this time.

She then reviewed the proposed Heritage Review Committee composition and structure and the chart which outlines what types of activities require permits and heritage reviews, along with a typical application form.

She reviewed the general approval process. An application for changes to a heritage resource would be made by the property owner to the appropriate municipal clerk. The proposal would be reviewed by the Heritage Review Committee, which would make a recommendation to the appropriate municipal council. Council can approve as applied for, approve with conditions or refuse to approve. Applicants would have the right to appeal any decision to the Ontario Municipal Board.

Day to day maintenance operations and emergency repairs would not require heritage reviews and permits.

WS finished her presentation by outlining the County/Local memorandum of understanding in general terms, which sets out the responsibilities of each level of government.

Finally, she outlined the next steps of the process - comments will be received tonight and until September 30 either verbally or using the comment sheets at the rear of the room. All comments will be considered and changes made to the plan as considered appropriate. The final draft plan with changes incorporated and noted will be posted on the County website for a final period, and then recommended to County Council for approval.

The floor was opened to questions and comments.

Ian Veen asked how taxpayers bordering on the district would be protected, i.e. what if they wanted to change the siding on their homes?

WS noted that homes not having direct connection to the oil district and heritage would be classified as Level 3 resources and not subject to heritage review.

DP noted that homes which border the proposed district but are not within its boundary would not be affected by the plan in any way.

Don Kersey felt the plan should say that clearly.

WS noted that this will be made clear in the plan.

Gordon Perry asked if the boundary could be adjusted so that some of the homes, especially along the south side of Victoria Street, could be excluded from the proposed district.

WS felt that would be appropriate, and the boundary could be moved so that it runs along the rear lot lines instead of along the street in front.

Al Byers disagreed with statements made earlier in the meeting that the development of the plan has been an open and consultative process. No one had contacted him directly.

WS reviewed the process to date, including an optional public open house held earlier, as well as continual dialogue with all major producers within the proposed district.

Ross Mitchell asked if individual property sales or transactions will have to be reviewed by the Committee.

WS replied no.

Len McDonald felt that this was an important process and that the area needed to be preserved. However, he noted that there are concerns that should be addressed. In particular, he asked what would happen if the County decided that it wanted to take over the local approval process. He felt it would not work well that way.

WS noted that if there are major organizational or other changes, the plan would need to be reviewed and decisions made at that time as to whether amendments were required. Those would be subject to another public review process.

DP explained that the County was only directly involved in this process as a means of facilitating it, because there were two separate local municipalities involved in the proposed conservation district. County Council has indicated clearly that it has no interest in being involved in the local approval process.

Gordon Perry agreed based on his discussions with County Council, and again noted the need for periodic reviews of the plan to ensure it is working well for the local community.

John Mavity supports the plan, and noted that it would have the most impact on the oil producers. He felt it was important and appropriate to have the committee set up to include 3 members of that group.

Dennis Smith asked what additional regulations would be imposed on property owners if additional designations such as UNESCO were added to the area.

WS noted that the heritage conservation district plan is the regulatory designation. Others, including UNESCO, are "honorary" and do not impose additional restrictions.

Ian Veen asked who will pay the Heritage Review Committee members.

WS said they will all be volunteer appointments. Wendy noted that some municipalities have put a heritage fund in place to assist with renovations or other improvements within districts.

Christine Poland asked for clarification that this fund is voluntary on the part of the local councils and not mandatory.

WS said it will be recommended in the plan, but implementation is voluntary.

Al Byers asked if properties could be removed from the district, or if owners could choose whether they wanted to be in or out. He asked that this question be reflected specifically in the minutes.

DP agreed to note it.

The question was asked as to whether there are any funds available to buy out properties within the district.

WS answered that there were no such funds available.

Jim Piggott said he initially supported the idea of the plan but was reconsidering given the taxpayer expense that may be involved. He was unsure as to whether the taxpayers of the Village should be contributing to a heritage fund that would be used by private owners in the district.

Christine Poland noted that the Town of Petrolia has a similar fund for downtown business/property owners. She also noted that this type of fund can be put in place whether there is a heritage conservation district designation in place or not.

Len McDonald asked if there will be application fees for the heritage reviews.

WS said it is not a common practice, and Gordon Perry said there is no intent to charge fees at this time.

A question was asked regarding how a home with a capped well on the property would be treated in the plan.

WS felt it would likely be a Level 2 resource.

A question was asked requesting more detail on the County/Local agreement.

WS outlined the general responsibility under the agreement for the County would be to maintain the plan, and for the local municipalities to undertake the permit approval process.

A question was asked with regards to what would happen if the oil production dried up - would the heritage resources have to be maintained even if they were not pumping oil?

Don Kersey felt that should be a situation that would trigger a major review of the Plan.

WS agreed.

Ian Veen asked why this proposed boundary does not match the National Historic Site boundary.

Charles Fairbank briefly noted the history regarding that designation.

WS summarized the meeting, and thanked everyone for their participation.

The meeting ended at 8:30 p.m.