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Hillside – Thousands flooded to Guelph Lake Island for the Hillside Festival July 28 to 30. ABOVE: Emmanuel Jah performed during Gospel Hour on Sunday morning. His songs and poetry are inspired by his experiences as a child soldier in Southern Sudan. RIGHT: Priyanka, 2020 winner of Canada's Drag Race, had the crowd dancing and singing along during her performance on the main stage on Saturday afternoon. Many know Priyanka from her time as children's network host on YTV and some of her former coworkers from YTV were in the crowd looking on. More coverage on page 29. Photos by Robin George



County awards construction work for over-budget projects

Councillors call for better financial scrutiny; White urges special meeting

By Jordan Snobelen

GUELPH – A new Wellington County roads garage in Wellington North, a new library branch in Erin, and renovations to turn a Guelph building into transitional housing are all moving forward despite being way over budget.

Wellington County council voted on July 31 to approve construction contracts totalling \$31 million for the three projects, but the meeting wasn't without resolute objections from some councillors.

Campbell Cork, Steve O'Neill and Earl Campbell voiced apprehension over the cost increases, which ranged between 40 and 82.6 per cent over budget.

The trio reiterated earlier comments made during committee meetings on July 26, when recommendations to award the contracts were first discussed.

Representatives from construction companies and architects involved with the projects placed blame for the massive increases on an erratic construction market.

One by one, the roads, social services and finance committees, and the library board, supported recommendations to award construction work for the over-budget projects.

Finance committee chair Chris White told councillors last week that "implications, whether it's the 10-year plan, impact on reserves, or any of those things" would be discussed in detail at the Monday council meeting.

"Whether you support these projects or not ... what matters most is that you're making an informed decision," he remarked.

"There's no doubt in my mind that we're going to be having a more fulsome debate."

But the fulsome debate never

materialized.

'We have exceeded our budget'

Cork asked, perhaps rhetorically, when council would say "enough is enough" with the cost overrun on a county roads garage in Wellington North.

The cost of the garage project near Arthur has risen to \$16.8 million from the \$9.2 million budgeted. Local taxpayers are covering \$4.82 million of the project through the county's roads capital reserve.

"When we were thinking of this whole project, we approved a price that was, as I say, about half this one," Cork said, adding he is feeling "a little blindsided."

"I think we need to go back and have a look at this and reconsider it, maybe look at other alternatives."

Campbell agreed, saying, "it should be kicked down the road, revisited and retendered next spring, and the committee should

review it."

They, along with O'Neill, voted against awarding a construction contract to Dakon Construction Ltd. for over \$13 million.

The trio also voted against awarding a construction contract valued at over \$9 million to Demikon Construction Ltd. for a new library branch in Erin.

The cost of a new library in a restored Erin grist mill has risen to nearly \$13 million from \$8 million. Local taxpayers are covering \$8.63 million of the project through the county's property reserve.

Cork, Campbell and O'Neill have all said a new garage and library are justified, but not at the current price.

"We have exceeded our budget so much on these projects," O'Neill said on Monday, adding future construction projects need to be better scrutinized.

While the northern Wellington councillors opposed inflated spending, others spoke passionately of the new library branch, in particular.

From grist mill to modern library

During last week's committee meetings, councillor Diane Ballantyne spoke of the positive social, environmental and economic benefits of libraries.

"We're taking something truly significant and making something new and revolutionary out of it," said councillor Doug Breen, adding economics shouldn't get in the way of the opportunity "to do something truly great."

Councillor and finance committee chair Chris White said the library is a "good investment" of taxpayer dollars and went so far as to say the old grist mill is important

SEE BUDGET » 36

Fergus South secondary plan gets another airing

Council hopes development will be beautiful, sustainable with lots of trails

By Joanne Shuttleworth

FERGUS – Some 7,000 dwellings will be added to Fergus when the Fergus South secondary plan is realized, and Centre Wellington council sees an opportunity to ensure the development is beautiful, sustainable and includes plenty of active transportation amenities for residents.

Township staff, planners with MHBC Planning and developer/landowners have been working together for two years to establish a master environmental servicing

plan for the lands, which stretch south of Fergus to 2nd Line and cross Highway 6 from Guelph Street to the west and Scotland Street/Jones Baseline to the east.

That plan, presented to council on July 26, also sets out potential land uses within the area.

MHBC planner Dave Aston said that early on, employment lands were part of the plan. But since the province has prioritized housing, and since the township is developing a business park in north Fergus, any employment in Fergus South will primarily be office and retail.

The plan marks out water and sewer lines and storm water management ponds. Aston said the experts are deciding whether to use gravity drainage or a pumping station method but that won't change the route of the underground infrastructure.

Collector roads have also been mapped out. McQueen Boulevard will extend east to Scotland Street and there will be two other collector roads – one running from McQueen to 2nd Line and the other running from Hwy. 6 to Scotland Street. A roundabout has been suggested

where these two roads intersect.

A large natural heritage feature runs diagonally across both halves of the land, and these will be maintained. Trails are proposed to run alongside these features.

In terms of land use, properties on both sides of Hwy. 6 will be in a mixed-use corridor with medium density housing and then low density housing tapering away to the east/west boundaries.

Neighbourhood and community parks and a school are also part of the plan.

"The plan will establish height

and massing," Aston said, adding an urban design guideline will be established through the site plan or plan of subdivision processes.

"We want good quality designs and architecture," he said. "We want to create a space that's inviting to the community."

The area at 2nd Line and Hwy. 6 will be zoned "commercial gateway" and there is opportunity to make this a very special entrance to Centre Wellington.

Resident Donnie Poirier was worried the extended McQueen

SEE SOUTH FERGUS » 26