

## **Bracebridge Examiner, Gravenhurst Banner, The Muskoka, Muskoka Sun**

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### **Clear Lake residents protest YMCA's development plan**

MUSKOKA LAKES — A plan to increase development rights at a YMCA camp in Torrance created a public outcry at a recent Muskoka Lakes council meeting.

The YMCA's Camp Pine Crest on Clear Lake, owned by YMCA of Toronto, requested a zoning change on a 90-acre portion of its property to permit a higher development allowance, said David Pink, senior planner for the township. The new zoning would permit 90,000 square feet of gross floor area on the site, or double the 45,000 square feet currently allowed.

There is no specific development proposed at this time, but the camp owners would like some flexibility when updating some of the older buildings and cabins on the property, said Pink. There are plans to provide year-round opportunities at the camp, he added.

The plan prompted Clear Lake and surrounding property owners to submit 57 letters to the township.

"They are all in opposition or recommend a deferral (of the proposal), at a minimum," said Pink.

The main concerns are the effect of the camp's expansion on water quality and traffic and the timing of the public meeting, he said.

Those opposed to the application filled council chambers on Nov. 16.

In regard to timing, Stephen Fahner, director of planning for the township, explained that under the Planning Act, municipalities are required to deal with an application within 120 days of receiving it.

"Unfortunately, we don't have any choice when we receive an application," said Fahner.

John Gallagher, planner for the camp, said the camp has been in operation for 100 years on Clear Lake and has 650 acres of property, with 2,100 feet of frontage.

He said YMCA has invested more than \$100,000 in upgrades to the septic system.

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Even though Clear Lake is considered to be over its phosphorus threshold according to local municipal standards, the camp is a permitted use, he said.

The Muskoka Lakes official plan allows for expansion for specific uses, he argued.

As the property is redeveloped, the camp will pay development charges, which can be used to make road improvements, Gallagher noted. The township has strict policies dealing with site plans, including buffering and vegetation, he added.

The camp provides a unique outdoor opportunity for young people, said Alex Versluis, vice-president for YMCA of Greater Toronto. The camp takes a lot of pride in environmental sustainability education, said Versluis.

“For many children, it is a place where it is the first time they see nature in its true pristine state,” he said.

Gary Deathe, president of the Clear Lake Property Owners Association, which represents 140 cottagers on the lake, said the association isn’t against the camp’s reasonable ability to grow.

Ironically, members have fundraised for the camp’s expansion, said Deathe.

“We love Camp Pine Crest, but one thing I quickly realized this week is we are not dealing with our local Y camp; we are dealing with decisions being made at a Toronto boardroom.”

Clear Lake property owners have been working to reduce the phosphorus in the lake for years, he said.

Water quality testing shows the highest phosphorus levels were near the camp in 2008, according to Deathe.

“Development of this potential magnitude has to have a negative effect on the readings, and the camp should be held accountable to define exactly what they are going to build and how they are going to control phosphorus before we issue a massive bump up in zoning capacity,” said Deathe.

Visibility has dropped dramatically in the lake, he added.

“Clear Lake is in danger of not living up to its name,” Deathe remarked.

The remainder of Clear Lake is being rezoned to permit lower density in an effort to reduce the current phosphorus load, he noted.

“Paradoxically, it seems the current proposal, endorsed by the planning committee, seeks to double the property rights of the largest property on the lake.”

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Deathe asked that the camp show how it plans to reduce phosphorus levels.

There are also concerns about increased traffic on the one narrow road that accesses the camp, he said.

Deathe said cottagers have grave concern for the real reason for the application. He suggested there have been non-YMCA-based events and weddings at the camp, and some fear there may be conferences planned for the site.

Clear Lake cottager Brenda Buck said she is concerned with the YMCA's plan to operate year-round, and what that means for water quality.

If council approves the application in its current form, the association is prepared to fight, Deathe said.

"The Clear Lake Property Owners Association is definitely prepared to defend this position before the OMB (Ontario Municipal Board)," said Deathe.

The camp is not trying to create any division, said Gallagher, and the YMCA will meet with the Clear Lake association members.

"We will try to work with the residents and the new council to move forward on the application," said Gallagher.

Council agreed to defer the application for more information after the two parties have had discussions.