

## **Pickering attempts to acquire private land located in middle of park**

Moya Dillon

September 14, 2011

PICKERING -- A piece of privately owned land in the middle of a Pickering park could soon be in the City's hands after councillors voted to co-fund a purchase with the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA.)

At an executive committee meeting on Monday, Sept. 12 councillors voted to approve a 50-50 cost split to purchase the 0.14-acre tract of private land in the middle of TRCA lands at Frenchman's Bay Park for \$20,000, but only if ownership would be conveyed to the City of Pickering, rather than the TRCA. "We've had several issues of late, and this is a perfect example, where the City and taxpayers are putting money into properties and then many years down the road the intention of that property is lost and no one seems to remember what the purpose was or suddenly they have different intentions," said Councillor Jennifer O'Connell.

"We've also run into situations where we own something but have to ask someone for permission to have it as public use. I think we need to start taking the lead and ensure if we're going to put in 50 per cent of any money that we have ownership, because the one piece of the puzzle we don't have is the title." Everett Buntsma, director of community services for the City of Pickering, explained that the cost-sharing partnership came out of a 1999 council resolution that approved 50 per cent maximum funding for waterfront land acquisition with the TRCA.

"There was a resolution of council in the 1990s stating that the City would pay 50 per cent of the cost but TRCA would own the property," Mr. Buntsma explained.

"This is the last parcel of land that's still privately owned within Frenchman's Bay Park. It's one building lot and it does have road access, so while there's no road there currently, if someone were to build on it they could ask for that road allowance to be opened up. The TRCA finds it very important to have that piece of land."

Coun. O'Connell moved to amend a recommendation approving the funding to include the stipulation that the City of Pickering would receive conveyance of the land for the 50 per cent contribution.

While Mayor David Ryan said he appreciated the concern regarding ownership, the consequences of not approving the purchase could be dire.

"I appreciate the intent and understand the concern," he said. "That being said, if this amendment were to pass and the TRCA rejects the offer, either the TRCA

picks it up and pays the whole shot or everyone walks away from the deal. Then we have a property in the middle of a conservation area, with a road allowance attached, that could be sold and developed. There's nothing to prevent that happening and I think that would go against everything we're trying to accomplish as a council."

Councillors voted in favour of the amendment. The amended recommendation will come before council Monday, Sept. 19.