

Trailer park to become condos

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Staff Reporter

Generally, any time the words "lakeside development" are spoken in Haliburton County, the developer in question is sure to face fierce opposition. Gerry Kowalski, owner of the Silver

Beach trailer park on Wigamog Road, is hoping to soon buck that trend.

After years of meticulous planning and assessments, Kowalski is currently in the midst of a re-zoning application with the Municipality of Dysart. He wants to have the grounds of

his trailer park approved for the construction and development of a "lifestyle community."

As the proposal stands now, the new development would include 36 bungalows and 23 townhouse units on the park's 22-acre property - a self-contained, condominium-style com-

munity groomed for seniors who want to live in the Highlands without having to maintain a large house or cottage. The proposal also includes some light commercial uses for the land, with the potential of establishing a community hall,

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Council is positive about Silver Beach plans

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spa, massage parlour, hair salon, or small bistro on-site.

Kowalski, who has been dreaming of this project since before he even owned the property, says he's confident the new development would lead to only good things for the surrounding county.

"What we want to bring to Haliburton is 59 new homeowners, new taxpayers, and new purchasers who are going to shop here," he says. "It's quite a different type of development. This isn't just a thrown-together subdivision, this is something that has been well thought out over many years."

In fact, Kowalski first conceived this whole idea back when he still owned a trailer in Silver Beach, rather than owning the entire park. Around the bonfire, he would sometimes muse with fellow campers about what he would do if he owned the property, a prime piece of land with deeded access to a sandy beach on Lake Kashagawigamog. Four years ago, when the park went up for sale, Kowalski took the first step towards realizing that dream.

Whereas similar development proposals often suggest building on a piece of undeveloped land, Kowalski's vision differs insofar that it would take property already used for tourism, and transform it in to a neighborhood of permanent residences. Likewise, the new community would be desirable from a municipal standpoint, since all of its roads and properties would be privately maintained by the owners.

However, one bone of contention early on in the process was the issue of added boat traffic on the waters of Lake

Kashagawigamog. But Kowalski says surrounding cottagers shouldn't be overly concerned about an increase in the number of boats, as he has already thought up some possible ways to keep the numbers down.

"We've been considering a fleet of three boats - one pontoon boat, one power boat, and one fishing boat - that would be owned by the corporation, available for the residents to book and share when relatives come up to visit on a July long weekend, for example," he says.

The new lifestyle community would also keep the 28 boat docks that have been historically associated with the Silver Beach property, meaning nearly 50 per cent of the residents could own their own water vessel if they desired. Kowalski says he doesn't anticipate demand would exceed that, due to the community's target market.

"With maturing people, not all of them want the responsibility of a boat anyway," he says.

From an environmental standpoint, the development shouldn't put much of a strain on the surrounding area, says Kowalski. With nearly 76 trailers already on-site for the summer months, the property is already hooked up to full municipal sewage services, and Kowalski says his company would have a number of additional wells drilled to supply the community with water.

Likewise, although the property is nearly 22 acres in all, Kowalski says only

15 will be developed, in order to leave some forest, snowshoe trails, and deer yard at the back of the property intact. All in all, he says his intentions are to change the physical landscape as little as possible, but the economic landscape as much as possible.

"So far there has been very little opposition, but if there is any opposition, it really boils down to, 'What would you rather have?'" says Kowalski. "Seventy-six trailers or 59 year-round homes? We believe we're really doing something valuable with the property, and we hope that the spirit of what we're doing will catch on."

But as the current owner of the Silver Beach trailer park, and former trailer owner himself, there is still one group of people that Kowalski is still concerned with, and that is the current users of the park, some of whom are good friends of his.

"That's probably one of the hardest parts of this for me," he says. "In that park we have the highest quality of people you could ask for."

With that in mind, Kowalski says that should the project be approved, he will probably allow for a year of pre-sales with the hope that some of the trailer owners would consider coming on-board with the new project.

"I think they would be a real benefit to this community, and a lot of them are at that age where they could retire here, could live here and could become a part of this community," he says.

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MURRAY FEARREY

Dysart Reeve Murray Fearrey says that so far his council has been impressed by Kowalski's plans, which are more thorough and well-researched than council is accustomed to, he says. And although the project is still working its way through the public process, and there's a way to go before it receives the official stamp of approval, council is nonetheless positive about the impact such a development could have on the municipality.

"There's still a lot of work to be done, and there's a public process to go through, but in general I'd say that council is very positive about seeing that particular property developed," he says. "It's a win-win for the community, for taxes, for development, and for the economy... and in the long run it's not a big onus on the municipality to maintain, because it's self-contained."

Fearrey says that the project has also tweaked councillors' interest because it addresses a long-standing problem within the municipality - a lack of affordable housing to draw in new taxpayers, and a lack of facilities to keep retirees in the community.

"It's certainly something that council has been aware of, that there is a need for more housing. I'm sure we've all heard of people who can no longer stay in their summer home, or their home on the lake, and they want to move into Haliburton but they can't because there are no facilities. We end up losing them to Barrie, Bobcaygeon, or some other community.

"This hopefully will fill that void, so we see it as positive," Fearrey says. "Hopefully we'll work through the process and it will eventually become an asset to the municipality."