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Trouble in the trailer park

Mobile home residents search for answers about where they'll end up if redevelopment takes over

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Jason Liebregts/Metroland

Whitby Trailer Park residents including, in front, Herb Wasson, Florence Shular, Dorothy Henebery and Shirley Contois, feel threatened by actions of the property owners who have put in an application to the Town to have the land rezoned for high residential development.

WHITBY -- Life at a quiet mobile home park in Whitby has been anything but peaceful since tenants learned they could be uprooted from their homes.

The owners of the property at 1010 Dundas St. E., which contains 68 mobile homes, three single-family dwellings and two apartments, have made an application to the Town to rezone the area for high residential development. They plan to put up four four-storey residential condominium buildings with 420 units and one five-storey mixed-use building with 808 square metres allocated for commercial purposes.

If the proposal is approved, the trailers would have to be removed or, in the case of the older ones, demolished. This leaves the residents, who are mostly elderly or disabled, stranded with no place to go.

Some have lived at the location for more than 40 years, dating back to the Second World War, while other residents had just enough time to move in and get settled before they heard the news last month. The property includes rental trailers as well as permanent ones.

Jim Renison purchased a trailer at the property for his daughter this past fall and bought the one he lives in two years ago. He wasn't told of any future redevelopment plans either of those times, he said.

"I wouldn't have spent my money from the sale of my cottage to buy into here," he said. "I would have bought a house instead of putting $30,000 into here."

Shirley Contois, who's lived at the park for 20 years, said she recently invested more than $6,000 in renovating her trailer, including putting in a new roof, flooring and appliances.

"I'm just devastated because I don't know where to turn," she said. "I love my trailer and I put myself into it."

Owning a mobile home gives seniors the freedom to be on their own and with most of them living on fixed incomes, it is an ideal form of affordable housing, said Dale Switek, vice-chairman of the Subway Mobile Homeowners Association in Whitby.

"The seniors that are living in this community have a sense of being independent because they own their own place and don't feel like they're cooped up in a box in an apartment or having to rely on somebody to come and take care of them."

When the most recent land owners took over the property, residents were told development could take place but were assured that the mobile park would stay and be improved on, resident Yvonne LeBlanc said.

"Now we find out, no, they're just after the mighty dollar and they don't care who they displace," she said.

Residents are hoping council will persuade the private owners against the development but if forced to leave, they expect to be given an alternative location for their trailer or proper compensation, Ms. LeBlanc said.

Under the Ontario Residential Tenancies Act, a mobile home park owner is required to give tenants at least one year's notice of termination and may also have to provide compensation, which is one year's rent or $3,000 -- whichever is less.

Applying to Durham Region Housing could be an option but with nearly 4,000 people already on the waiting list, it

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