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# Former development battleground too pricey for eco-park builders

Barry Gray, The Hamilton Spectator

*The 17-hectare parcel on York Road at Valley Road is a high priority conservationists hoping to build an eco-park.*

By Matthew Van Dongen

The heart of a planned urban eco-park — a development battleground in Dundas for the past two decades — is up for sale as potential estate homes.

Two parcels and almost 40 hectares of former farmland in the Pleasantview area billed as potential investment properties or a "dream estate," were listed this week for a combined \$6.7 million.

Conservationists covet the land because it sits within the proposed Cootes to Escarpment Eco-Park, an ambitious effort to link 1,900 hectares of protected green space around the harbour in what would be one of Canada's largest urban nature sanctuaries.

The 17-hectare parcel on York Road at Valley Road is a high priority because it's in "the hole in the doughnut" of natural lands owned by the Royal Botanical Gardens and two conservation authorities, said project supporter Brian Baetz.

"It really is right at the heart of what we're trying to protect," said the McMaster University professor.

But at \$3.4 million, that property is also priced far outside the means of park fundraisers.

"We've been in contact with the owners, and we will be again, but that is a lot of money," said Councillor Brian McHattie, chair of the Hamilton Conservation Authority.

McHattie noted the HCA's foundation bought a neighbouring 21-hectare property for \$800,000 in March. "We would respectfully disagree with the value they are setting on the land."

Co-owner Joe Mattiacci argued Wednesday both properties still have value as potential estate homes, despite increasingly strict development constraints in the area.

"I have no idea what it's going to sell for in the end, but this is what we think it's worth," Mattiacci said, adding he's willing to negotiate. "I'm not trying to be the bad guy here — if the government wants to buy it, go ahead and buy it."

The Burlington developer said after 25 years of failed building efforts, he's ready to move on.

The community values the land all the more because of those development battles, said McHattie, who helped spearhead opposition to the original housing proposal that was killed by an Ontario Municipal Board decision in the 1990s. A more recent pitch for seniors housing was also rejected.

"There's a lot of passion involved — a lot of people have dedicated years to protecting this land," he said. "We'd like to see it remain natural in perpetuity."

Baetz said he's confident the land won't be quickly snapped up for development, noting the OMB decision means only one new home can be built per 10 hectares. The Pleasantview area is also subject to provincial Greenbelt and Niagara Escarpment Commission oversight.

Mattiacci maintains the York Road property could still make a "beautiful little estate development," compatible with existing single-family homes along Valley Road.

But he also acknowledged the intense community interest in the property. Mattiacci said a Wednesday effort to mow the property for marketing purposes spurred multiple calls and inquiries from neighbours.

"If (eco-park supporters) could find someone with deep pockets to buy it, it would be a win-win for everyone," he said. "Just give me a fair price."

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