

Port authority wants to clear Ojibway Shores for storage

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The Windsor Port Authority wants to move forward with a plan to cut down trees and level land on Ojibway Shores on Windsor's west end.

Port authority president David Cree said the plan is to "clear a fairly large portion of the site" and leave wildlife one quarter of the land.

The plot of land is approximately 12.9 hectares or 32 acres in size and abuts Black Oak Park. It's very near the proposed plaza that will service a new Detroit River international crossing once it's constructed and links west Windsor to the Delray community of Detroit.

The plan is to eventually develop the area, but only after clean fill from the Herb Gray Parkway is trucked in to raise the land above the flood plain. The work is to be completed by fall of 2013.

In the short term, Cree said the cleared land would be used to store materials used by companies working on the parkway.

The plan is being met by fierce opposition by environmentalist groups, including Essex Field Naturalists and members of the Detroit River Canadian Cleanup. The groups met Thursday after to discuss a plan of action.

The Citizen Environment Alliance claims Ojibway Shores is the "last remaining stretch of undeveloped, natural shoreline in Windsor on the Detroit River."

The group says the size and location of the land acts as a significant ecological connection.



The Citizen Environment

Alliance claims Ojibway Shores is the last remaining stretch of undeveloped, natural shoreline in Windsor on the Detroit River.

According to Dillon Consulting, which was hired by the port authority, with recent legislation changes, a Canadian Environment Assessment Act screening is no longer required for the project.

The firm says it is conducting a species at risk surveys this summer.

The firm says that although not required by law, the port authority will also conduct a due diligence environmental assessment once surveys are complete.

"We'll be basing our next steps regarding what we can and can't do on that land," Cree said.

It's not clear what the land will eventually be used for long-term. The clearing, land leveling and addition of soil is to make it more attractive to developers.

According to the authority's website, the land can be used for "any industrial use including warehousing and truck transportation facilities."

Exclusions include:

- Slaughtering.
- Sawmill.
- Iron and steel mill.
- Concrete or asphalt batching plant.
- Explosives.
- Soap.
- Petroleum Refineries.
- Salvage yards.

The project plans will be available for viewing July 3 between 3 p.m. and 5 p.m. at Mackenzie Hall in Old Sandwich Towne. A public meeting follows at 6:30 p.m.

Cree said the port authority also plans to meet with the Essex Region Conservation Authority.

Last year, Windsor city council's environment and transportation standing committee wanted the land preserved as a natural heritage site. That would have required the port authority's cooperation.

"I see no indication the port authority is any mood to cooperate," committee member and Coun. Percy Hatfield said. "We wanted that saved but we needed the port authority's cooperation."

Ojibway Shores may be preserved, not developed

Port president David Cree says no fill from Herb Gray Parkway 'will certainly change our business case'

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The Windsor Port Authority's board of directors on Wednesday officially put the proposed plan to develop Ojibway Shores on hold.

Port authority president David Cree said in a media release that the authority will work with local environmental groups, the City of Windsor and other governmental agencies "to identify possible alternatives to the development of Ojibway Shores."

The Windsor Port Authority had planned to cut down trees and then infill part of the property with dirt from the Herb Gray Parkway project. The authority hoped work would begin in the fall.

But Transport Minister Denis Lebel and a contractor working on the parkway have both said the port authority won't be getting any of the dirt from the construction site.

"Please be assured that Transport Canada has no intention of using the Ojibway Shores land to accept fill for the Detroit River International Crossing project," Lebel wrote to a group of concerned environmentalists opposed to the project.

Cree said that would affect the business case for developing the land.

"If we can't obtain any clean fill from that location it will certainly change our business case for the proposal and that will form part of the total-package information the board looks at," Cree told CBC News before a board of directors meeting Wednesday. "If that's no longer available, that's certainly going to be an important factor for us to look at."

The port authority told CBC Windsor's Lisa Xing it was originally looking for a tenant to develop the approximately 13-hectare plot of land but that it would now possibly consider a tenant who would, instead, preserve that land.

Environmentalists say it's the last natural and undisturbed piece of riverfront property in Windsor and a key link to Black Oak Heritage Park and Ojibway Park.

Derek Coronado, of the Environment Citizens' Alliance, said he and others want a more permanent solution to preserve the land, perhaps a 100-year — or longer — lease.

The port authority held a public meeting last week to discuss the plan. Nearly 200 people showed up to the standing-room-only event at Mackenzie Hall.

"The purpose of the recent open house was to give the public an opportunity to express their views about our proposed development and to obtain further information about possible important species on the site," Cree said in a media release. "The numerous concerns raised at the public meeting are under consideration at this time."