

Residents ask Province to fund Badlands plan

Foes of a proposed parking lot at Caledon's Cheltenham Badlands are trying to get the Provincial government involved.

About 30 members of the group calling itself Save the Badlands were on hand Saturday for a rally at the site, and the activities included the circulation of a petition calling on the Province to get involved.

The Badlands are owned by the Ontario Heritage Trust and managed by Bruce Trail Conservancy.

The site is a deposit of Queenston Shale on the south side of Olde Base Line Road, between Chinguacousy and Creditview Roads. The soil and vegetation have been worn away at the site by erosion, and the result is a formation of red rock with deep gullies running through it.

Concerns have been expressed over the safety of people visiting the site. There is currently no designated parking area, meaning cars have to be parked at the side of the road where there are numerous steep hills. Sightlines in the area are a worry too.

Peel Regional council in May approved the construction of a parking area just east of the site that would accommodate 33 cars and two buses. There are also plans to set up a viewing area.

But area residents of the area have been voicing opposition to the idea.

The petition, addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, stresses the need for community consultation and engagement in development of the site and surrounding lands. It calls on the Province to fully fund the Cheltenham Badlands Management Plan. It notes the Plan includes fencing around the site, viewing platforms, boardwalks, trail maintenance, etc., but makes no mention of a parking lot.

Bonnie Ledson, of Save the Badlands, reported yesterday (Wednesday) that the petition had drawn a little more than 100 signatures so far. Copies of the petition are available at the General Stores in Cheltenham and Inglewood, Spirit Tree Estate Cidery, Higher Ground Coffee Shop in Belfountain and other locations.

The rally formed around the intersection of Olde Base Line and Chinguacousy. Participants marched west to the site, chanting slogans like, "Find a new spot: No parking lot?" and "How can you preserve, When you've no funds reserved?"

Barb Shaughnessy, who is running for the Ward 1 Regional seat on Caledon council, addressed the audience, stressing the need to take care of the land.

"Our community prides itself with being great stewards of the land," she commented.

She also observed that part of the problem is with the popularity the site has received, with tourists visiting and walking all over the grounds. "The Badlands are being loved to death," she said.

The shale is estimated to be some 445 million years old. The site used to be farmland until excessive clearing and grazing led to erosion. Shaughnessy said the lands have been worn away considerably from all the attention.