

Proposed Island Lake stage proves a controversial issue for Mono Council

The possibility of a performance venue being installed at Island Lake was a controversial topic at the last Mono Council meeting.

It saw two separate delegations on the issue, one from the Island Lake Stage Advisory Committee, and the second from local resident, Marc Darby, regarding concerns about the stage.

The first delegation spoke to council to provide them with an update regarding planning and research around the proposed stage in Credit Valley Conservation's Island Lake Conservation Area, as well as the results of a survey sent to area residents.

‘There were already previous plans for a performance venue at Island Lake a very long time ago, but it remained undeveloped at the time,’ explained committee member Marilyn Logan. ‘Before developing the venue, we wanted to make sure that the CVC and Island Lake management were in agreement, and that we had the proper step to move forward.’

The group had obtained a noise bylaw exemption for an event last June, which was utilized as an opportunity to test the impact of the stage on neighbours, as well as test necessary logistics such as parking availability and facility usage. Following the event, two different surveys were sent out to gain an understanding of the impact of a performance venue in the conservation area.

‘The surveys were designed to get feedback both from people attending the event, and we did a neighbour study to find out likes and dislikes,’ explained Ms. Logan.

Despite handing out 320 surveys to residents, only 22 responses were returned to the group, which left some council members concerned that the actual feeling of residents might be different from what was presented through the report.

‘I was struck by the small number of responses that you got back,’ said Councillor Fred Nix. ‘I’m concerned that a lot of residents didn’t respond. The number that didn’t could include a lot of people who might respond to us in the future if we give our support for this.’

He added that maybe the remaining residents had no concerns, and that they chose to throw it out and not respond, so technically they had their chance, but he wasn’t sure whether that was something they could bank on.

Deputy Mayor Ken McGhee also expressed concerns that the CVC had not provided feedback on the impact such a venue would have on migrating insects, mating animals and birds.

‘There is going to be a negative impact no matter what you do, but mitigating the negative impact on species is important,’ said Deputy Mayor McGhee. ‘As it’s a conservation area, I’m very reluctant to support the move from a nature based environment to an urbanized facility.’

Bill Lidster, North Zone Operations Manager for CVC, was present as part of the delegation, and responded to the concerns raised regarding the environmental impacts.

‘The Blast event was held with the purpose of sound testing to see how it would impact neighbours and the area,’ explained Mr. Lidster.

He added that in the discussions, the impact on local wildlife was also considered, but it would not be possible to determine the long-term effects on wildlife without a longer monitoring period.

‘There is no scientific data that shows any negative effects on migrating birds or reptiles,’ he said. ‘We will have to continue to monitor the effect, but it takes years and years of monitoring. We are going to be doing our due diligence.’

However, Marc Darby felt that the committee and the CVC were not doing their duties, with a higher concern on increasing visitation numbers and income for Island Lake, rather than being concerned with actual conservation.

‘I respect and admire all members of the Island Lake Stage committee, and I completely understand how the Theatre Orangeville group is passionate about bringing this in to the community,’ he said. ‘However, with the CVC’s role in this, I feel they are more interested in visitation numbers instead of zealously protecting the environment. I tried to bring my priorities forward to the committee, and joined believing they would bring a balanced report to the town.’

He continued, adding that at the meeting he attended he got the feeling the purpose of the committee was not actually to examine the feasibility of the project, but to promote the project to the town, only presenting overwhelmingly positive results.

‘The committee’s desire to advance their own agendas is attributed to [them] not paying attention to the very important downsides that could negatively impact the most important groups vulnerable to the impact,’ said Mr. Darby. ‘History has shown how groups can impose their ideals and visions on another group. This is why the ‘do unto others’ statement is important. Not everyone appreciates loud performances.’

While Mr. Darby’s feelings concerning noisy events are well known, after requests have been made not to allow the Relay for Life and to have more restrictions on the Orangeville Fall Fair, this time, he highlighted some of the findings from the surveys, which suggested that neighbours share his views.

‘Seventy-one percent of those affected by the Blast event found the noise levels above their comfort level, and 50 percent found the noise unacceptable,’ he said. ‘I remain in favour of a non-electric stage that could host performances of other plays, weddings, etc that could use acoustics, and request the town not allow anyone who wishes a loud performance to inflict their wants on the local residents.’

He added that there is a definite need to have fair and open discussions with everyone involved.

With the appropriate controls, the sound levels and the impact on the surrounding neighbours could be reduced, and remain below the acceptable level, however Mr. Darby felt that shouldn’t even be considered.

‘We could meet the regulations if it was controlled and be within the guidelines, however I am suggesting as an alternative, that we exceed the absolute minimum level within the guidelines,’ he said. ‘I would like to see us hold this conservation area to a higher standard of noise and operations. People don’t want to hear the noise. They want to hear the birds, hear the wind, hear the leaves crushing under their feet.’

According to the Island Lake Stage Advisory Committee and the CVC, however, the venue would not be used as a nightly performance location. Even in the summer months, performances would not be held seven days a week, and the CVC would evaluate any proposed performances to ensure that they don’t conflict with timing and breeding windows for wildlife. Performances would not be held during periods that have been proven to be known breeding times for any area wildlife.

And while Mr. Darby felt that the committee and CVC are pursuing goals with ulterior motives, rather than being concerned about the environment, Mr. Lidster confirmed that environmental impact remains their top priority.

‘The CVC has a rigorous management plan process that looks at all elements of usage and what effect it will have,’ said Mr. Lidster. ‘We are currently reviewing our management plan and looking at the factors and effects of usage, so that we can have a sustainable area for generations.’

Council accepted the information provided from all parties, and agreed that more information and reports would be required to help all parties work together to make the best decision surrounding the issue.