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Tuesday, 29 May, 2007

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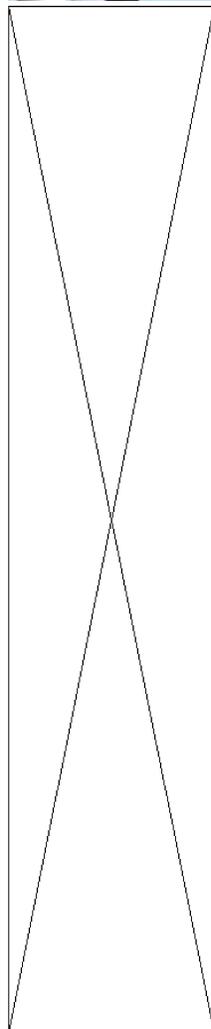
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### Sifton agrees to look at swap

Tue, May 29, 2007

**The developer may get land elsewhere instead of building at Riverside and Wonderland.**

By **JONATHAN SHER, SUN MEDIA**



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An hour before what was to be a battle over prime land along the Thames River, London politicians and a developer agreed to lay down arms and pick up calculators.

Rather than head for a likely showdown before the Ontario Municipal Board over a proposed office tower at Riverside Drive and Wonderland Road, Sifton Properties and the politicians agreed last night to try to make a deal, with the city to offer money and land.

The move drew cheers from 100 Oakridge residents who packed the city hall gallery, smiles around council chambers and a note of caution from Coun. Nancy Brans-combe: "I don't want to create false expectations."

The standing-down came the same day a London controller who wants to limit development along the Thames accused city staff of ignoring a scientist who predicts unprecedented flooding brought on by global warming.

Gina Barber was the most strident but not alone on a council committee that directed staff and council to meet with Slobodan Simonovic, who directs the University of Western Ontario's Institute for Catastrophic Loss Reduction.

Further restrictions would please those who want to preserve natural heritage and insulate the city against the risks of flooding, but at a cost borne by those who plan to build there, including UWO.

Those who want less development along the river point to the Sifton application as Exhibit 1, a proposed five-storey office building that drew the opposition of virtually everyone in

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Oakridge.

"What you want is no development. I've heard you loud and clear," Controller Gord Hume said.

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The night was a success for Coun. Roger Caranci, who's pushed for a land swap or deal for a couple of months.

"The city should have purchased this land a long time ago," Caranci said.

Whether it will do so now may depend on the price. Sifton bought the 0.8-hectare parcel two years ago for \$400,000 and has since paid consultants to prepare it for development.

But the same land, if it could not be developed, would be worth a tiny fraction of the purchase price -- clearly not acceptable, Sifton vice-president Phil Masschelein said following last night's planning committee meeting.

Masschelein wouldn't say how much it would take to seal a deal, but did suggest it may take land and cash.

The time to deal is short. The planning committee wants something firm in place by its next meeting June 18.

Simonovic's research projects flooding along the Thames that would be the worst in recorded history.

But city staff suggest modest changes to the way development is limited along the river, writing in a report the risk of flooding brought on by climate change "is not yet known" and in need of "further study."

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Barber compared their position to cigarette makers denying smoking's harmful effects because it wasn't "proven."

"This is the kind of thinking that was going on in the debate about cigarette smoking," she said. "We shouldn't allow development until we know that it's safe."

Also concerned was Branscombe, who met with Simonovic last week and said his projections were too quickly dismissed by staff.

"I think we can't be flippant about this," she said.

Meantime, the committee didn't endorse the three options now before it:

- Keep the status quo with two zones along the Thames, with no development allowed in the zone closest to the river and flood-proofed building allowed in the farther zone.
- Allow no new development in either zone -- the so-called one-zone approach.
- Keep two zones but make new private development take a

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back seat if the land is needed for city public works, to protect existing private development or to guard against flooding along the entire length of the river.

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- London bars development on land that floods once a century, the so-called flood plain, but allows flood-proofed buildings just beyond that -- the flood fringe -- on land that floods once every 250 years.

- A UWO scientist warns the city's rules are based on past weather, outdated in a global-warming era. He predicts future floods along the Thames River will be more severe.

- Council must decide whether to further restrict river-area development. Some want to bar all new buildings, but city staff have proposed more modest measures.

- A city council committee yesterday directed staff to consult with the scientist.

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