University sells land

Faculty group opposes sale

BY JIM KELLY
THE CHRONICLE JOURNAL

Lakehead University president Fred Gilbert isn’t divulging the price of a 12.5-acre parcel of land the university has sold to the River Terrace subdivision.

He confirmed the deal has been approved by the university’s board of governors.

The land-locked property is located just north of Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre (TBRHSC) and south of the subdivision.

Gilbert said more homes will be built on the land “but they’re going through the planning process with the city.”

The sale of the land is expected to come before city council Monday.

The university sold a huge tract of land just north of Oliver Road to TBRHSC for $1 for construction of the hospital which opened in 2001 replacing the former McKellar General Hospital and Port Arthur General Hospital.

“Yes, that was, in effect a donation,” Gilbert said. He said the latest transaction is for land that the university has viewed as residential development land.

“I think it’s zoned residential,” he said.

There are some grumblings in the university community about the sale of the land.

Lesley Curthoys, an associate professor in the school of outdoor recreation, parks and tourism, said the faculty association is opposed to the sale.

She is chairwoman of the Lakehead University Faculty Association’s physical environment committee.

“The committee has been working to ensure the long-term sustainability of the Lakehead’s natural areas on behalf of not only Lakehead University’s students, staff, and faculty, but also the broader Thunder Bay Community as a whole,” Curthoys said.

“The land proposed for development protects a major tributary flowing into the McIntyre River and it is designated as an environmental protection area (specifically as a Natural Corridor) in the City’s Official Plan.”

Lesley Curthoys
Associate professor

Curthoys said the public benefits of protecting this land include:
- Improved air quality
- Protection of water quality
- Flood control
- Protection of fish habitats
- Noise reduction
- Health benefits
- Recreational area
- Protecting of biological diversity

“These long-term social benefits far outweigh the short-term economic gain.”

Gilbert said River Terrace had years ago indicated they had an interest in the property in the long-term.

Gilbert said initial negotiations began about a year ago. He said this was an opportunity to get some value for land that the university couldn’t use for its own development purposes.

He said the university is not going to put the proceeds of the sale to the university’s deficit because there is no deficit.

In fact, Gilbert said the university has had a balanced budget for the 2006-07 fiscal year and expects one for 2007-08.

“We don’t have a deficit and it’s important that people know that,” he said.

He said the money from the sale of the property will go into a reserve fund and eventually will be part of the university’s endowment fund.

“It will be there for use when needed in the future,” Gilbert said.

“The land proposed for development protects a major tributary flowing into the McIntyre River and it is designated as an environmental protection area (specifically as a Natural Corridor) in the City’s Official Plan.”

Lesley Curthoys
Associate professor
More noise, less nature

BY BRANDON WALKER
THE CHRONICLE-JOURNAL

Murray Hinter was one of several people who spoke against the River Terrace proposal to build 71 single detached homes in a subdivision near Lakehead University.

Hinter and his family moved from Calgary into a River Terrace home in 2005.

"Being newcomers we were not totally aware of some of the problems," he told councillors on Monday.

Hinter said his home is in one of the company's first developments, so until moving in he had no idea the noise he would hear while sitting on his patio.

"Once the house was built, then we noticed the noises coming across. We're happy with the trees that are there now," Hinter said.

River Terrace Developments has an agreement to purchase a 13.5 hectare chunk of land from Lakehead University in order to develop the fifth phase of its project, although not everyone is in favour of it.

Hinter believes if trees are chopped down and homes are built, he and his neighbours will be able to hear the helicopter when it lands at the nearby hospital, along with noise from the hospital's ventilators.

Hinter said the company's proposal to plant a single row of two-metre-high trees might provide a buffer "15 to 20 years from now."

The hospital is "an industrial establishment. It's not a pretty site. It's not a very desirable place to build a $500,000 home and the city would be doing an injustice to the citizens of this community by allowing this development," Hinter said.

Art Lannon of River Terrace said the housing development would act as a sound buffer, although Hinter didn't feel the development would do that.

Several Lakehead University students spoke against the redevelopment of the land, from future residential to residential.

Lesley Curthoys, associate professor of Outdoor Recreation, Parks and Tourism at Lakehead University, said green land is slowly being removed from the area. She is the chair of the Lakehead University Faculty Association Physical Environment Committee. Curthoys passed around two aerial photos of the land around the university to show the reduction of natural space.

"Take notice of how much land (around) the McIntyre rivershed that has been lost," she said.

A stream runs from that area into the McIntyre River. Curthoys believes the subdivision will degrade the natural corridor, putting more runoff and toxins into the river while eliminating much of the natural environment. She also said studies have found that trees visible from hospital rooms help patients with recovery, so it may have an effect on health and recovery.

Councillors discussed the rezoning proposal until late Monday night. Their decision wasn't available by deadline.