

Board ruling kills the Winona blob

Quashes proposal to build 17 luxury homes

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The Winona blob is dead.

A provincial board ruled this week against a proposal to build 17 homes on a piece of farmland in the shadow of the Niagara Escarpment. The decision ends more than a decade of strife over the 3.8-hectare lot and settles a long-standing debate over where new development should end. "Urban sprawl has stopped here," said Ken Whitbread, manager of the Niagara Escarpment Commission.

The ruling by the joint board, which represents the Ontario Municipal Board and Ministry of Natural Resources, sends a signal that even small intrusions into protected green space won't be tolerated, he said. It comes the same week the joint board is considering another 250-house development on the Niagara Escarpment in Milton. "I think precedent is always important and this is a really good one," said Whitbread.

The board decided the proposed development southeast of Winona Road and Highway 8 would not preserve or enhance the area's landscape, including the prized view of the escarpment.

Every year, there are six to 12 requests to amend the Niagara Escarpment Plan to permit development. Most often it's for rock pits and quarries.

In the Winona case, Hamilton General Homes, owned by Peter and Gabriel De Santis, wanted to build high-end homes. They could not be reached for comment yesterday. The board's decision can be appealed to the provincial cabinet in the next 28 days.

The board's decision also resolves the long-standing dispute about Winona's urban boundaries. Different planning documents have offered conflicting interpretations. The region's official plan just drew a circle to designate the boundary, leading to the infamous nickname the Winona "blob."

The ruling means the contentious area will remain outside the urban boundary, preventing future housing developments. The city will update its planning documents to comply with the ruling in the fall.

"It's just putting it all to bed finally," said Councillor Brad Clark, who has urged his colleagues to take a strong stand against the development in recent months.

Residents in the neighbourhood incorporated themselves to fight the housing project and sat through the 18-day hearing to show their opposition.

"We did this on a shoestring budget," said Brenda Johnson, adding she's hopeful the victory will motivate others to fight for causes in their neighbourhoods.

"Residents actually do have a voice."

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