

The Black Birch Restaurant: Fresh food and a special ambience

By CONSTANCE SCRAFIELD-DANBY
Columnist

"People tend to look to a restaurant for more than food," said Mark Morgensen, chef/owner of the Black Birch Restaurant on the Hockley Road. "They care about the food, but they want a pleasant evening as well. I work to make a good ambience in my restaurant so that no one feels hurried - they can just relax and enjoy their meal."

To add to that ambience, Mark brings in entertainment twice a week: a guitar player, Norman Leota, strums through the evening on Thursdays and there are jazz musicians playing and singing on Saturdays. Mark came to Hockley Valley, about 18 months ago, when an acquaintance of his, David Watson, heard he was looking for a place. David knew a couple who wanted to purchase the property on which the restaurant stands but needed to secure a tenant for the business as part of the deal. They offered Mark the premises and he decided to take the plunge.

Mark had been a partner in a restaurant/spa combination just the other side of New -market. However, for him, the restaurant was not a success and he sold the business in 2007. He took the summer off to think and to look for another place in a

more urban setting. In spite of thinking that he wanted to stay in a town, when he came to see the property in Hockley, he liked the vibe of the building. As a boy, Mark had gone to school in Tottenham and he told me it was like coming home. He said, "I felt comfortable when I walked in the place."

There was plenty to do by way of upgrading in the kitchen and renovations in the dining area but he opened on November 15, 2007. The owner of Creemore Coffee dropped in while the work was going on and Mark opened an account with him. "It's great coffee," he commented. "Our customers really like it."

Naturally, a restaurant is a continuing work in progress. Last year, the septic system was updated and now the restaurant has 50 seats. Also, the means of attracting customers in this area have taught many lessons.

"The music wasn't drawing people at first," said Mark, thinking it over. "But music is such a prevalent thing here that I kept the musicians coming. People look forward to hearing them now."

Mark changes the menu on a regular basis and is always on the look-out for new wines. He recently took on two new wines from Featherstone Winery in Niagara. "Why not go with Ontario wines?" was

his comment. "There is some nice wine coming out of the Niagara region. It's good to shop close to home."

Many local residents remember the restaurant when it was "The Woodside" and they have come to the Black Birch to check it out.

"People appreciate having a restaurant in their neighbourhood," Mark noted.

Along with this, the Black Birch is now open seven days a week.

Commenting on this, Mark told me, "I met Melissa McTeer whose cooking I really like - good taste, nice textures -

she subs for me two days a week - usually Tuesday and Wednesday."

In answer to my question, Mark told me, "It is worth it to open Mondays, when all the other fine dining restaurants are closed. Sometimes, people want to eat out on a Monday, so they come here."

Going back a bit in Mark's personal history, he went to U of T to study chemistry. In his second year, he moved into a house with friends and found he had a flare for cooking. In his fourth year, he realized he did not want to be a chemist.

So, he went back to school, to George Brown

College and then got jobs working with good chefs. His mentor, Chris Klugman, is a well respected chef, currently in Summerhill, Rosedale.

Of his future, Mark is happy where he is.

"I just like cooking," he replied to a question about

his ambitions. "I offer a fresh cuisine; it's all about the quality. The better the food, the more simply you cook it. If the food is sub-standard, you have to work harder with it to make it taste good. Some of the best food is simple. We cook fresh daily and

this time of year is great. I buy the best steak I can and serve it simply, with just a little red wine reduction. I drop into a farmers' market on my way to work and I've been working to know the local farmers. Now I can get my lettuce from a green house in

Hillsburgh - it's so good - so fresh. I'm primarily a French or Italian cook, but I'll cook anything."

He finished the espresso he had been sipping.

"I just want to be part of the community," he said. "And I'd like to have a 100-mile restaurant."



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NOTICE OF PUBLIC MEETING FOR PROPOSED HOUSEKEEPING AMENDMENTS TO ZONING BY-LAW 02-2009

A public meeting will be held at the Amaranth Township Office to consider the following municipally initiated housekeeping amendments to Zoning By-law 02-2009:

Application Nos.: N/A

Council Meeting: **July 15, 2009 2:00 PM**

Lands Affected: LANDS WITHIN THE TOWNSHIP OF AMARANTH

Present Zoning By-law Status:

The Township of Amaranth Zoning By-law 02-2009 came into effect on March 18, 2009.

Proposed Amendments to the Zoning By-law:

The nature of all proposed amendments to Zoning By-law 02-2009 are housekeeping in nature and are required to clarify existing zoning by-law provisions and to correctly implement the intent of the Official Plan.

Purpose:

- To make minor boundary adjustments to that portion of the Elba-Camilla Provincially Significant Wetland Complex (PSW) that is located within Lot 26, Concession 1. Given the boundary adjustments, very small pockets of land are rezoned from the Rural (RU) Zone to the Environmental Protection (EP) Zone, as shown on Schedule A to the Zoning By-law. By way of background, Official Plan Amendment No. 3 (OPA No. 3), recently adopted by Council, updated all environmental features within the Township. During the Provincial review of OPA No. 3, the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) advised the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) that very minor boundary adjustments are required for the Elba-Camilla PSW (see Item 1 on the attached location map);
- To permit an accessory agricultural use within the Agricultural (A) Zone and the Rural (RU) Zone (for those lots that do not meet the minimum lot area requirement for a principal agricultural use) and to establish a maximum size for a livestock building associated with an accessory agricultural use within the Agricultural (A) Zone, the Rural (RU) Zone and the Rural Residential (RR) Zone (No map is provided for this proposed amendment as it applies to the whole Township);
- To establish an Extractive Industrial (MX) Zone on land within the East Half of Lot 3, Concession 3 which is designated "Extractive Industrial" in the Official Plan and which has a valid license from the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR). As such, Section 73 of the Aggregate Resources Act overrides the zoning by-law currently in place, and therefore the zoning by-law should be amended to reflect the licensed circumstance (see Item 3 on the attached location map);
- To add a new Development (D) Zone within By-law Number 02-2009 to be utilized where appropriate, i.e., where lands are designated in the Official Plan for development but which remain in a non-development zone such as the Agricultural (A) Zone or the Rural (RU) Zone. The Development (D) Zone will be applied to lands located within Part of the West Half of Lot 1, Concession 1 and Part of the East Half of Lots 1, 2 and 3, Concession 2 which are designated "Employment Area" in the Township Official Plan (see Item 4 on the attached location map); and,
- To permit residential lots in the Rural (RU) Zone and the Rural Residential (RR) Zone to have a minimum rear yard requirement of 7.5 metres consistent with the former Zoning By-law 69-2004 (No map is provided for this proposed amendment as it applies to the whole Township).

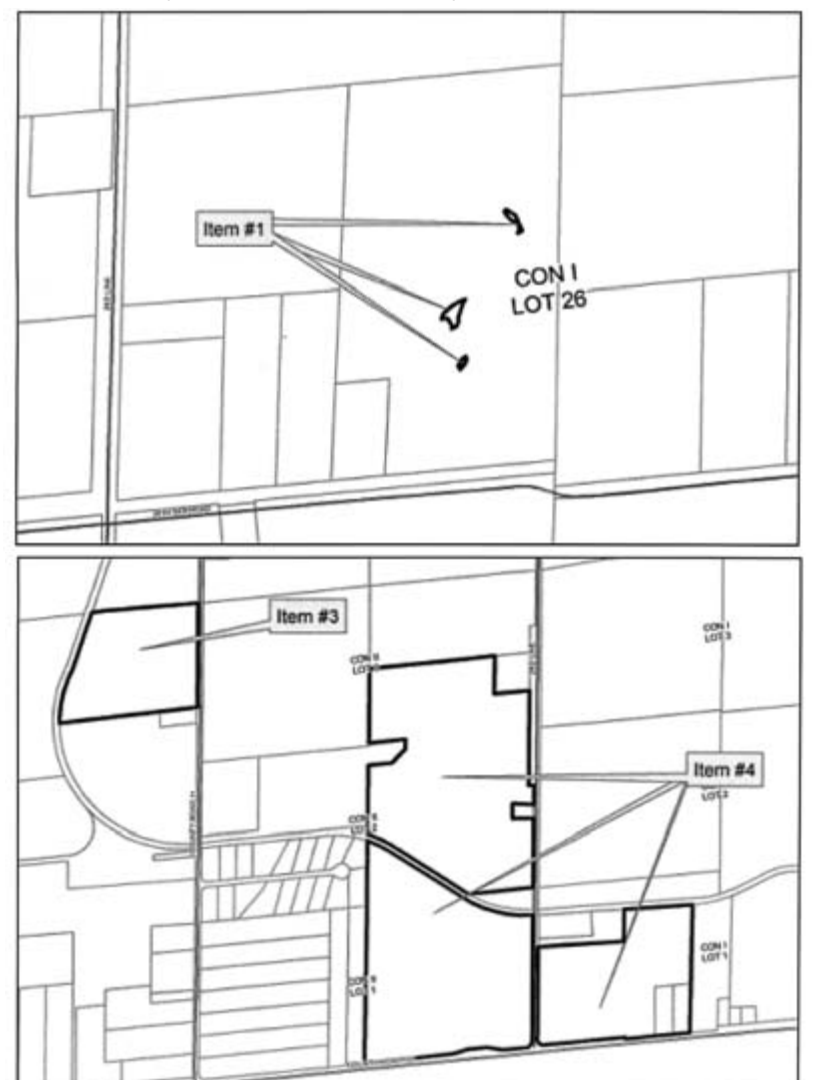
Public Meeting:

Copies of the proposed amendments are available on the Township Website at www.amaranth-eastgary.ca/ta/a_notice to download, or at the Township of Amaranth Administration Office to review.

You are entitled to attend this public hearing in person to express your views about the housekeeping amendments or you may be represented by counsel for that purpose. If you wish to make written comments, they may be forwarded to the Clerk-Treasurer at the address shown above.

FAILURE TO ATTEND HEARING: If a person or public body does not make oral submissions at a public meeting or make written submissions to the Council of Township of Amaranth before the by-law is passed, the person or public body is not entitled to appeal the decision of the Council of the Township of Amaranth to the Ontario Municipal Board; If a person or public body does not make oral submissions at a public meeting or make written submission to the Township of Amaranth before the by-law is passed, the person or public body may not be added as a party to the hearing of an appeal before the Ontario Municipal Board unless, in the opinion of the Board, there are reasonable grounds to do so.

DECISION: If you wish to be notified of the Decision regarding the housekeeping amendments, you must submit a written request to the Township. This will also entitle you to be advised of a possible Ontario Township Board Hearing. Even if you are the successful party, you should request a copy of the decision since the decision may be appealed to the Ontario Municipal Board by another member of the Public. If you wish to appeal to the OMB, a copy of an appeal form is available from the OMB website at www.omb.gov.on.ca. The form must be submitted to the municipality or approval authority within the allotted 20 day period, with applicable fee by certified cheque or money order.



Susan M. Stone, A.M.C.T.
CAO/Clerk-Treasurer

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