

A fresh approach to land development

GUELPH — After more than 20 years in the development industry, Andrew Lambden knows how new projects typically come on stream.

He's looking to change it.

The founder of Terra View Homes purchased a 14.7-hectare parcel at the city's northeast corner six years ago. But rather than clear the land to prepare for new homes, the company removed invasive species such as buckthorn and then planted approximately 1,500 native species trees.

It also put nearly 12 hectares of long-abandoned farmland back into active production, and installed a solar array on a barn on the property which generates more energy than the barn uses for geothermal heating and lighting.

"We've certainly had a lot of advance thinking on this," Lambden said in an interview Wednesday.

The property in question stretches from Woodlawn Road to Eramosa Road, east of Muskoka Drive and Brant Avenue.

The company has proposed a large development, which would see 279 residential units — including detached homes, townhouses and apartments — as well as a commercial/office/residential building, parks, open space and a community garden.

Lambden said rocks collected during cleanup of the site have been saved and will be incorporated into some of the eventual landscaping.

"We've tried as much as humanly possible to take advantage of the existing resources on the land," he said. "It's a lot more work to do it this way but we've found it very rewarding."

Terra View already has a reputation of building energy efficient homes, but with this project "we wanted to take it to the next step; to do it on a whole community scale," Lambden said. "It will make for a much nicer community from Day One ... so when we actually start to build houses the ecology and the landscape will be much improved."

Ward 2 Coun. Ian Findlay applauded Terra View's approach to the project.

"I think he's demonstrating the right way to put in a development," Findlay said. "I think what Andrew's doing is building the neighbourhood and then building the houses."

"It's sort of turning things on its head by establishing the neighbourhood and then building the houses around it," Findlay said.

The proposal will be presented to councillors during a planning meeting June 5 "so I'm looking forward to hearing when (the developer) has to say and asking some questions."

Dave Schultz, a spokesperson for the Grand River Conservation Authority, said GRCA staff have been working with the developer on a rehabilitation plan for the property.

Lambden said he has also been speaking with officials from the Grand River Conservation Foundation about ways the proposed development could assist financially, such as by donating a portion of the proceeds from home sales to offset the cost of constructing a new Guelph Lake Nature Centre.

None of this surprises Rob Kerr.

Lambden and Terra View "have been supporters of the Community Energy Initiative since its inception," said the manager of the municipal program. "Andrew was around the table when the plan was being put together."

Terra View had one of the first solar arrays in the city at its Speedvale Avenue office complex, Kerr noted.

Lambden noted he hopes to make the multi-residential components of the new project "net zero," which means they will generate as much energy as they consume "by using all the tools in our tool kit."

"Our goal is to make it the most environmentally sound development in Canada."