

Here's why Windsor residents want to delay a land sale near Fort Edward National Historic site | SaltWire

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Here's why Windsor residents want to delay a land sale near Fort Edward National Historic site

West Hants Historical Society, residents hope to delay rezoning, change councillors' minds

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Liz Galbraith first learned of the proposed rezoning of two municipal lots near the Fort Edward National Historic Site when she walked by a small sign notifying the public. - Contributed

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WINDSOR, N.S. — Despite a recent surge of community interest in redeveloping Windsor's former outdoor pool site, West Hants council is moving forward with negotiating its sale to a private entity.

It's a decision that has the president of the local historical society flummoxed, a Windsor resident lobbying to delay rezoning of the property, and the mayor defending council's decision.

The property in question, which is located adjacent to the Fort Edward National Historic Site, was remediated at the end of 2019 to make it more appealing to prospective buyers. It was put on the market in the fall of 2021. Concurrently, a rezoning application was put forward to change the designation from open space to residential (R2). That's how Windsor resident Liz Galbraith learned about the plan to sell the property.

“If it just goes to the highest bidder, then they're not serving the community. It can't always just come down to tax base and that sort of thing. You have to look at what's best for the community, beyond just dollar signs,” said Galbraith, a former Windsor councillor.

Galbraith has launched an online Facebook group aimed at delaying the rezoning process. She says municipal councillors are overlooking a significant tourism opportunity if they rezone and sell the land.

“This is a golden opportunity to use the fort as a focal point for community engagement, for reconciliation,” said Galbraith.

“There's so many different cultures in our community that have had some sort of a tie to the fort, whether it's French, Indigenous, Scottish...”

Even North America's oldest continuous agricultural fair first began at Fort Edward.



Fort Edward National Historic Site, home to the oldest standing wooden blockhouse in Canada, draws hundreds of tourists every year. The historical society says developing the neighbouring property to house a museum or trading post with washrooms would help bolster tourism. - File Photo

Fort Edward National Historic Site, located at 67 Fort Edward St., was built by Major Charles Lawrence in 1750. In 1755, it served as a deportation centre for Acadian families. It also served as an important military base during the Seven Years' War, the American Revolution and the War of 1812. Additionally, the grounds were used by troops waiting to deploy overseas during the First World War.

The site consists of the oldest standing wooden blockhouse in Canada. The grounds are open year-round, however, the blockhouse is only open to visitors during the summertime.

One of the main complaints from tourists is that there are no amenities handy — particularly no washrooms or picnic tables.

Timeline:

- 1967 — Windsor’s Centennial Swimming Pool opened.
 - 2006 — Centennial Swimming Pool decommissioned.
 - 2010 — West Hants Historical Society members requested Windsor council only entertain development of the pool site if it was sensitive to the neighbouring historic site.
 - 2018 — The Jewish Legion Centennial Society commemorated the 100th anniversary of Jewish recruits assembling at Fort Edward prior to deploying to fight in the First World War. Plans were announced to construct a centennial pavilion at the former pool site.
 - 2019 — Deteriorating former pool demolished, site filled in.
 - September 2021 — 36 and 65 Fort Edward Street locations in Windsor were posted for sale, with a listing price of \$303,000.
 - Nov. 23, 2021 — West Hants’s CAO given direction to negotiate the sale of the former pool site and adjacent lot (PID plots 45059797 and 45059805).
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“Parks Canada is not in the business of building tourism amenities. That’s for the local community to do,” said Galbraith.

That’s why she’s hopeful the community will voice their concerns over council selling the nearby land. She says it’s the ideal location to house a museum, or a trading post, with washrooms. It would be complementary to the federally-owned site and could showcase some of the hundreds of artifacts that have been unearthed over the decades.

“Aside from a few signs up there to kind of explain what the fort is all about, it doesn’t really go into the breadth of what the fort has been to the area, even prior to the Acadians,” Galbraith said.



Six archeologists with Parks Canada spent time in 1986 digging two test pits at Fort Edward, looking for evidence of a palisade. - File Photo

Building on history

Recently elected historical society president Shirley Pineo said the organization also wants to see something built there instead of luxury apartments or duplexes.

Pineo penned a letter to council requesting a nine-month delay so they could see what plan stakeholders could devise.

“Based on feedback we have received from visitors and community members alike dating back several years, along with initial interest of involvement from stakeholder groups we have approached thus far, we are confident we can deliver to council a progressive development plan to create a built structure that adds economic value and diverse interest to the existing site as well as provides a designated space for visitors and community members to gather, learn, enjoy, and reflect,” she wrote.

The letter wasn't discussed during council's Nov. 23 public meeting, however, it was referenced when council came out of an in camera session and made a motion to have the CAO enter into negotiations to sell the land to a specific bidder.

It's a move that has Pineo, a former West Hants councillor, frustrated.

"There are several (people), besides the citizens of this area, who feel the Fort Edward area needs to be better promoted," said Pineo in an interview.

She said the society can't develop the historic site due to archeological constraints.

"It's owned by Parks Canada and we can't go up there and build another building; we can't dig up there and do anything," she said, noting the land West Hants is selling would be perfect.

The historical society presented to council more than a decade ago requesting they be considered should the town want to part with it.

"They were left with the impression that we would have first right of refusal on that land," said Pineo.

36 and 65 Fort Edward Street, Windsor, NS, B0N 2T0

\$303,000

PROPERTY INFORMATION:

Attention Developers! Great opportunity to develop two properties (36 and 65 Fort Edward Street, Windsor). Lands are zoned R2 which allows for duplex dwellings. Lots are serviced and located in a desirable area in the downtown area of Windsor. Close to all amenities! Quick access onto Highway 101.

PROPERTY FEATURES:

Driveway/Parking:	Gravel	Sewage Disposal:	Municipal
Land Features:	Cleared, Year Round Road	Title to Land:	Freehold
Lot Size:	45,100 sq ft.	Utilities:	Electricity
Property Size:	1 to 2.99 Acres	Water Source:	Municipal

Courtesy of: ViewPoint Realty

Data provided by: [Nova Scotia Association of REALTORS®](#) 68 Highfield Park Drive, Suite 112, Dartmouth, Nova Scotia B3A 0E4

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The real estate listing for the former Centennial Swimming Pool site in Windsor has the two properties listed for \$303,000 and as being zoned R2 — a process that is still underway. - Contributed

Moving forward with sale

Following a private discussion by council, Mayor Abraham Zebian said they carefully considered the sale of the land before moving on it.

“It has sat far too long for council to just remain in status quo mode,” he said.

“The letter written by the historical society was very well done and it was very articulate but there’s a lot involved, there’s a lot to the site.”

In a follow up interview, Zebian reiterated the need for council to forge ahead with selling the land.

“Just recently, council has been looking at various parcels of land that it’s deemed surplus. We have a housing crisis. There’s a lack of housing all around the board and just parcels sitting idle, generating no tax revenue — no nothing for the taxpayers of the municipality,” said Zebian.



In November 2019, the Centennial Swimming Pool in Windsor, which had sat vacant for more than a decade, was due to be demolished. - File Photo

Galbraith says the housing argument is moot as there are multiple developments already in the works or pitched that will address the needs of the area, citing the proposal to build two large-scale apartment complexes on O'Brien Street in Windsor, as well as the continued expansion of offerings from Brison Developments.

“Basically, what they’re doing is going ahead with something and they don’t want to acknowledge that this is a very sensitive piece of land that has the potential — beyond just a dollar sign — of making a significant contribution to the community, both in terms of tourism and being a meeting place and a place of significance for different groups in our community,” said Galbraith.

Zebian said there is confusion in the community because there are two processes occurring — one being the sale of the land and the other being a possible rezoning.

“It’s two separate processes at two different times,” said Zebian.

“When we began the rezoning process, we weren’t sure what we were going to do with the actual property itself.”

The real estate listing for 36 and 65 Fort Edward St. indicates the properties are zoned R2. However, the process to rezone the community/recreation property is still ongoing, with a planning and heritage advisory committee meeting set for Dec. 2.

Zebian said he’s not sure why the listing referred to the site as already being rezoned. He said council could still reject that rezoning application and wait to see what a new owner wants to do with the land.

He said there’s no timeline for when the deal to sell the land must be finalized.

Zebian said council would also be supportive of working with the historical society if they wanted to undergo talks with the federal government to do something at the fort property in the future.