

Letter: Carleton Island — A Taxpayer Concern

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The deterioration of the villa on Carleton Island. Contributed.

The proposed development of the south and north bays area of Carleton Island has been under Town review since October 2023. There have been several changes in the scope of the proposal, legal action, and requests for additional information needed to complete the required environmental review.

For many mainland residents, this project may seem "out of sight, out of mind." But it raises questions that should concern every Town taxpayer.

The proposal has been presented in connection with restoration of the historic Carleton Island Villa, a project that a professional study has estimated could cost \$26+ million. Yet there is no guarantee that restoration of the Villa will actually occur as part of the proposed campground development. The intended use of the villa is as a hotel which infers that a rebuild of the structure, rather than a restoration, is a more appropriate word.

The Town has also incurred professional engineering and legal expenses in reviewing this private development proposal. The developer has made payments toward those expenses, including payments intended to cover professional review costs.

That is appropriate. But after nearly three years of review, taxpayers should know: What has the Town spent reviewing this project? How much has the developer reimbursed? Are all engineering and legal costs attributable to the application being paid by the developer, or have any ultimately been borne by Town taxpayers?

There is an even larger issue.

Although the application involves Carleton Island Villa LLC, the Town's review has focused primarily on the campground portion of the proposal. Future restoration and use of the Villa could create significant additional issues involving wastewater, docks, transportation, mainland parking and other infrastructure.

If restoration of the Villa is being presented as an important benefit or justification for this development, then **the Town should clearly establish what is actually proposed for the Villa, how its impacts will be reviewed, and whether there is a realistic and enforceable plan and schedule for its restoration.**

The Town has been reviewing this proposal for nearly three years. Asking these questions is not being anti-development. It appears that the reviews will not move forward in the foreseeable future. The time has come for the Town Planning Board to place limitations on the amount of time the applicant has to comply.

It is asking for fiscal responsibility, transparency and accountability to every taxpayer in the Town of Cape Vincent.

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