

'Significant gateway to Coves'

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REZONING: Planning committee is expected to approve a staff recommendation to rezone the site of a former Japanese restaurant

Consider it easy access to "staggering natural beauty," right off Wharncliffe Road South.

And Londoners will be a little closer to it today if the city's planning committee recommends rezoning the site of the former Ah-So Gardens Japanese Restaurant into a public open space leading directly into the Coves, one activist says.

"I'm ecstatic to see this moving forward. It's inspired and it's long overdue," said Thom McClenaghan, president of the Friends of the Coves.

"Now this could become a significant gateway to the Coves.

"Here is potential for a significant expansion of the trail system in London and people's enjoyment of an area that is absolutely beyond description in terms of its natural beauty. . . Wooded slopes, incredible colours, birds and small animals and a vista that is probably unchanged from the very beginning."

Planning committee is expected to back a staff recommendation to rezone the site at 201 Wharncliffe Rd. S., said committee chairperson Coun. Judy Bryant.

"We will recommend the zoning change. Then parks planning (department) will probably look at refining how it will actually look," she said. "Given the proximity to downtown, having an area like the Coves -- a little backwater people can go down to, even skate in the winter -- is a great amenity for the whole city."

A zoning change for the site of Ah-So Gardens, which burned down in 2003, comes as the city's latest move to recognize the Coves Environmentally Significant Area, which is home to deer, turtles, bald eagles and owls and considered a gem with its series of ponds and ravines in south London.

Earlier this year, the city agreed to purchase four hectares of environmentally- sensitive floodplain along the Coves, south of Springbank Drive and just west of Orchard Street from Scarborough-based Chata Holdings Ltd.

"This move . . . now allows passageway from Springbank Drive to Cove Road, and then up through Elmwood Avenue," McClenaghan said.

For years, he said, visiting the Coves required many people to trespass across private property such as the German Canadian Club.

He dreams the Wharncliffe Road site will one day include a gateway to the East pond and information that explains the significance of the Coves.