

Pier pressure

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PORT HOPE - A newly-newly formed citizen's committee thinks the old industrial buildings on Port Hope's centre pier deserve a second chance.

The committee, which calls itself The Pier Group, hopes to convince council the best end use for the three industrial heritage buildings on the centre pier is rehabilitation and restoration as opposed to demolition, said Michael Wallace, the committee's media coordinator.

In early June, the municipality unveiled the Waterfront Master Plan which highlights long-range conceptual plans to guide the regeneration and rebirth of Port Hope's waterfront. The plans include a full-service marina; East Beach Park, with a playground, splash pad, beach volleyball area, picnic shelter and public washrooms; and the demolition and cleanup of the industrial buildings on the centre pier to create a recreation area for strolling, picnicking and fishing.

However, The Pier Group feels there are plenty of good reasons to rethink this scenario, said Mr. Wallace. The central pier is a good example of what urban theorists call "brownfield sites." Once the hub of industry and activity, the sites and their structures sit abandoned, their futures uncertain, he explained. But many of these sites in Canada and world-wide, previously written off as derelict, have been restored into "the jewels of their respective communities," he said. The sites are also examples of "green" rehabilitation, proof that old buildings can be recycled thoughtfully. He cites Toronto's Distillery District, a 19th century industrial site rehabilitated into a major tourist draw; the old cutlery-box factory in Newcastle; and Cornwall's Weave Shed Buildings, all former industrial sites now put to imaginative new uses.

The centre pier buildings are excellent rehabilitation candidates and their end-use possibilities are endless, he said. Although the buildings may appear to be past their usefulness, they are amazing structures — huge, cavernous warehouses flooded with sunlight all day, right on the waterfront, he said. Picture a new location for the farmers' market, an events centre, a sports facility, a new location for the Firefighters Museum or a conference site, all within a newly-landscaped park right on the waterfront, he said.

There may be a good reason in favour of demolition, Mr. Wallace admits. But council has not discussed its reasoning nor have council members revealed why they favour wiping the site clean.

"For now, The Pier Group assumes the decision was made in haste and that as the light dawns and the public becomes better aware of the possibilities, council will change its mind," he said.

Finally, the citizens committee encourages Port Hope residents to visit the harbour, look around and imagine how the centre pier could look with its buildings rehabilitated and put to new use within Port Hope's new park system.

For more information on group, visit www.thepiergroup.ca.



Peg McCarthy/Northumberland News

Christopher Wallace is the chairman of The Pier Group, a newly-formed citizens' group that wants to see the old buildings on Port Hope's central pier restored.