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# Councillor calls for Provincial action on Highland Gate

**By Brock Weir**

Residents living around the former Highland Gate Golf Course had no shortage of questions for Mayor and Council last month on what local lawmakers plan to do for them.

Next month, however, these residents will begin to get answers as the Town of Aurora hosts its first public planning meeting on current plans submitted to Town Hall by Geranium Homes.

With over 400 neighbours packing the public information session hosted by Geranium and their consultants at Dr. G.W. Williams Secondary School in April, the Town of Aurora is slated to take the meeting, tentatively scheduled for 7 p.m. on June 24, offsite to the larger accommodation of St. Maximilian Kolbe Catholic High School on Wellington Street East.

?It is important to point out that when I came back from the public information meeting [at Williams] there were probably 500 or so people in the audience,? Mayor Geoff Dawe told Councillors last week. ?It was very apparent when we come to our first public planning meeting on the Highland Gate issue that there would be insufficient room [in Council Chambers] and we do not want to be in the position of not being able to host people who wish to come, so I suggested we look around for another venue. I think it is important for us to be well ahead of this and ensure we're in a position where we can handle the expected turnout.?

This was a view widely supported by Council.

According to Town Clerk Stephen Huycke, given the number of people expected to turn out, and the availability of local venues, the only practical option is St. Max, depending on the approval of a permit from the York Catholic District School Board.

While Council supported the off-site meeting to accommodate the neighbourhood, more needs to be done to ensure that outstanding questions from the Highland Gate community can be answered before June 24.

?A change of venue is good, but for people who are looking for more information, [our website] sends you to a link that has been set up by the proponents [of the plan],? observed Councillor Paul Pirri. ?I think it would be wise for us to set up our own Frequently Asked Question (FAQ) section on our website. I think it is important?people are aware and have access to fully unbiased information before they go to a meeting. We have all received plenty of emails and I think the same points get repeated over and over again.?

Although June 24 is the only currently scheduled Public Planning meeting earmarked to discuss the plan, the reality is it is likely there will be plenty of further meetings before the final incarnation of the redevelopment plan is approved by Council ? or not. This is something Councillor Sandra Humfryes said needs to be fully communicated.

?The more they understand how this process works the better,? she said. ?I see an engagement with planning and communications together and using the communications and expertise to really push out that information so when public meetings happen, the residents have a really good understanding of what is happening, they are prepared, and do not let preconceived notions interfere with what is happening.?

There is still ?confusion? out there in the Highland Gate community over how the planning process works, agreed Councillor Michael Thompson, and information online isn't being updated as the process moves forward.

?We all recognize how important this issue is,? he said. ?There is so much information flowing out. I think we have an inherent responsibility to keep talking about communications. Certainly the website is one of the avenues we have and we need to get this information out immediately.?
Those questions are now being answered online on the Town's website, www.aurora.ca.

Before next month's Public Planning meeting, however, issues surrounding the Highland development could be aired as early as the May 26 Council meeting with a notice of motion from Councillor John Abel calling on an assist from the Province of Ontario.

His motion, which was formally given notice on Monday calls on Council to formally request Newmarket-Aurora MPP Chris Ballard to essentially re-introduce a motion originally proposed to the Ontario Legislature by Frank Klees, dubbed the ?Preserving Existing Communities? act, which would protect existing and established communities, such as the one existing around the former golf course.

He also calls on the Highland Gate Ratepayers Association to join the conversation urging Mr. Ballard ?to do everything possible to amend provincial legislation to protect the Highland Gate neighbourhood.?