

Trails Master Plan ignored again: advocate

Last Wednesday, there was a Public Planning Meeting. One of the development applications being presented was by The Stronach Group, relative to about 100 acres, located south of Wellington Street, east of Bayview Avenue.

The purpose was threefold, to subdivide the lands into ten development blocks, to set out natural heritage boundaries, and to establish a spine road network, which connects with the surrounding road network.

The Staff Report, by the Planning Department, sets out the Policy Framework: How the Planning Act, Provincial Policies, the York Region's and the Town of Aurora's Official Plans play into the Application.

But that Staff Report leaves out Aurora's Trails Master Plan, which is also a planning policy document. That Trails Master Plan has been in existence since 2011 as such, and coincidentally was adopted by a Council of which 6 Members, two thirds, are on the present Council, including our Mayor.

In the Trails Master Plan, one of the neighbourhood trails is expected to run diagonally through the western half of the lands under review, ending at the intersection of Wellington and Bayview. The trail routing was set out in this way so that walkers and cyclists could walk from the interior of these lands, aided by feeder trails, to the signalized intersection, where they could cross the two regional roads safely, in any direction.

The Trails Master Plan envisions trails to be in natural corridors, entirely off- road, not even in boulevards along the roads, for many obvious reasons. When the proposed diagonally running trail routing prescribed in the Master Plan is placed where intended, then the Developer will have to give up table lands that could otherwise be used for saleable buildings, and design the subdivision with the trail corridor taking priority.

In Preliminary Review Comments of this planning application, prepared by a Town employed professional, the lack of respect for the Trails Master Plan was pointed out, in clear terms. The Planning Department, however, takes the position that further clarification on the proposed multi-use paths, cycling options and trails within the subject lands can be addressed later.

The Planning Department staff have regularly left trails issues until the latest possible stage of the development application process. And as regularly, the routings set out in the Trails Master Plan have been thwarted ? converted to on-road, sidewalk corridors.

That is not what Aurorans want. In a question on a 2009 survey, conducted by the consultants who helped with the preparation of the Trails Master Plan, the respondents were asked if they would use an alternate off-road corridor in lieu of walking along a sidewalk, if it were available. Over 90 % answered yes.

Town of Aurora's staff and politicians value trails as tourism promotion worthy, but when it comes to complying with the Trails Master Plan, in order to increase walkability and cycleability of Aurora, for which table lands are needed to accommodate these grid and feeder trails, then they fail ? miserably.

This application will come back to Council, after comments made at last Wednesday's public planning meeting have been incorporated in a staff report. And then there is the option of appeal to the Ontario Municipal Board, if nothing changes. The discrimination against the self-propelled traffic has to stop.

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