

Apartment proposal leaves residents worried over backyard damage

By Brock Weir

Neighbours on Aurora's Amberhill Way are concerned about property and environmental damage if a six-storey apartment development just south of their property lines comes to fruition.

At issue is a 134-unit rental apartment building proposed for the northeast corner of John West Way and Wellington.

The site in question has changed hands many times over the years, along with the visions each property owner has had for the site, but the latest vision, if it ultimately receives the green light, could see significant changes to the property's topography to accommodate the building's footprint.

According to Katherine Bibby, Planner for the Town of Aurora, the developers' application will require the removal of land near Amberhill property lines to create fill to support the build.

Similar work began on the site when the John West Way area was first being developed to accommodate both Town Hall and the street itself in the early 1990s, but was halted shortly thereafter.

Since then, a community has been built up around the valley, which could be a gamechanger ? and that is the hope of neighbours who turned out at last month's Public Planning meeting.

?Due to the introduction of fill to accommodate development, cut and fill balance is required to ensure the floodplain capacity is not affected by the application,? Ms. Bibby told Council. ?Removal of the soil on the east side of the water course will ensure enough area is available.?

The Lake Simcoe Conservation Authority (LSRCA), she noted, is currently reviewing the studies proponents have provided and are expected to provide feedback.

Feedback, however, was swift when the application was before Council.

While representatives for the developers said filling was partially carried out in

1990, that a further cut and fill analysis was approved for the site in 2015, and new plantings of trees and wetland plants would represent a net gain to the environmental system, neighbours were unconvinced.

I can't understand

how there's no environmental impact on transferring fill from one side of the river to the other," said John West Way resident Keith Ingle on impacts to the tributary of the East Holland River that flows through the site. "How will the river be protected? That is not clear yet. Maybe it is too early, but for one I don't think that you can avoid an environmental impact to build this structure. I think it is a very sensitive area and perhaps it should be something else [that is not] intensifying the population."

Other residents said

they appreciated the need for affordable rental units, but not in a land that was environmentally special. More said they were particularly concerned that cut and fill on their side of the valley would lead to the erosion of their backyards.

The proposed cut and

fill activities in the area [is] intended to be a very gentle grading exercise," replied Amber Palmer, representing the applicants. "The full grading exercise [in 1990] was not completed at that time and I would say about 50 per cent of the cut area was completed and 50 per cent of the fill area was completed. Back in around 2011, we did a survey of the area to verify how much cut and fill had been completed to determine whether or not additional work could be completed under the initial application and it was agreed through staff that that was the case. What we're proposing is very consistent with what was initially proposed for this area. The cut is intended to be very minor, in particular near the water course."

But Councillor Wendy

Gaertner said she shared residents concerns, adding that a lot has changed in the area over the past three decades.

I am very

concerned," she said. "The approval given in 1990 was given in a whole different world. That was 30 years ago and now we have climate change and predictions of severe rains and flooding. To me, it is very concerning and I also don't like that the meadowland is going to be removed because the meadowland is important."

The application was accepted at the Public

Planning meeting and will come before Council at a future General Committee meeting for further discussion and community input.