

Aurora ?willing to attempt mediation? on Highland Gate redevelopment

By Brock Weir

Aurora is ?willing to attempt? Board-led mediation on the redevelopment of the former Highland Gate Golf Course.

Council unanimously passed a notice of motion brought forward last week by Mayor Geoff Dawe formally opposing the redevelopment plan for the land now before the Ontario Municipal Board.

Highland Gate Developments Inc. proposes a development of 184 individual lots, as well as a 10 storey condominium complex near Yonge Street.

The proposal has drawn widespread opposition from the neighbours surrounding the former golf course, as well as concerns from the Aurora community as a whole.

?Aurora Town Council is not in support of the Highland Gate Development in its current form and believes that there are better options, in terms of design and density, for that site,? said Aurora CAO Doug Nadorozny in a statement following last week's Council meeting. ?Aurora Town Council is willing to attempt mediation with other parties to try and resolve Council's concerns.?

While Council approved the notice of motion unanimously, it wasn't without some concerns of their own, with some questioning ?why now??

?The public planning meetings concluded at the end of 2015 and there has been a lot of conversation from the residents and the community as a whole on Council's position and, for the longest time, we haven't said anything,? said Councillor Tom Mrakas. ?I think one of the questions I would have if I was a resident is why now? Why now is this council coming out and saying it opposes the application in its current form? Why didn't they do it sooner??

According to the Town's legal department, there have been ongoing discussions on the matter with the Town's external legal counsel hired to handle the matter. They ultimately provided direction last week to move forward with the statement.

?Unfortunately, we didn't get it from our legal counsel until today and I know that some of this is already out in the community, hence the request,? added Mayor Dawe.

This satisfied most of the concerns expressed around the table, but timing was another factor for Councillors Wendy Gaertner and Tom Mrakas who said residents should have been given more time to digest the motion and be given the opportunity to speak about it before it came to Council for final approval.

?I think we have all pretty much said [we oppose the application in its current form] at one point or another,? said Councillor Mrakas. ?I think we all said that at the public planning meeting and it is great that it's [in the motion], but I think the main part of this whole thing is we're actually moving into a board-led mediation and that is the aspect that needs to be put forward. I think the residents are fully aware of our statements. Yes, it hasn't been publically made in an official document and it is great that we're doing it now, but we could have had an official document back at that public planning meeting that said Council opposes this application in its current form and we can put that out.

?I do question why now. Hindsight is 20/20 but at least we are doing something.?

Added Councillor Gaertner: ?We're not only doing something, we are doing the appropriate thing for this point in time. I am sorry we didn't have the opportunity to give residents notice that we were going to be discussing it around the table, and I think that is a mistake.?

Still, there were some remaining misgivings, particularly expressed by Councillor Sandra Humfries as well as Councillor Mrakas

about missed opportunities in this process.

?There was an alternative, but I do support this because I believe mediation is the right way to start,? said Councillor Humfryes.

Added Councillor Mrakas: ?I always believed there was another avenue and I would have preferred to take that road, but we are where we are and I will be in favour of the mediation because it is, at this time, the best option right now.?