

Changes to nursing home expansion don't go far enough for some neighbours

By Brock Weir

Changes to a planned expansion on a southwest Aurora long-term care facility aren't enough to satisfy some nearby residents. Plans are underway for a four-storey addition to the senior care residence on Murray Drive at Seaton Drive, a plan which has raised the ire of residents not only due to the height of the extension looming over the neighbourhood, but a lack of public engagement on the issue.

Since the matter hit Council last month, neighbours have spoken out about the height not being in keeping with the surrounding residential area, concerns over the shadows the building will cast over the neighbourhood, as well as problems that could arise from waste removal.

Representatives of the building owners came before Councillors last week to outline some changes made to the plan in response to these issues, but some Councillors said they didn't go far enough to quell neighbourhood worries.

“Since the application was last in front of the committee on September 13, a couple of items have been changed,” said Lauren Capilongo, a representative of FGKW Retirement Living. “We went to the Committee of Adjustment last week and received an approval for three minor variances related to a reduction in rear setbacks, a reduction in minimum manoeuvring space and a reduced parking ratio for the parking. We have met with some of the local residents that did voice some concerns over the application and the purpose was to understand their concerns and look for opportunities to adjust the site plan where feasible.” Among the changes are modifications to the building height, truck traffic, waste disposal and fencing. Gone is a peaked roof, which added to the height, to a flat roof, bringing the proposed building height down by approximately four metres to 12.8 metres. The current height of the building is 8.5 metres.

“We heard from residents and they had some concerns about existing waste disposal on the site,” Ms. Capilongo added. “We looked at different ways to remove that waste disposal and put it in a more appropriate location. What we did is move the waste disposal to the area towards the rear and the garbage is proposed to be enclosed by a six foot high retaining wall. On top of that, there are going to be some planted shrubs to shield any additional view the residents may have. The implication of this is the truck traffic that was intended to access through Seaton Drive will no longer occur. Everything will be shifted to the rear of the building.”

Over the last few weeks, several residents living in the vicinity of the retirement home have objected to changes to a facility located in what is now designated a stable neighbourhood, although such a facility is permitted under the current zoning.

The issue of shadows was addressed in a study conducted by the owner which showed shadowing four times of the day each season. A further analysis on traffic was conducted by the Town, which outlined no concerns.

Nevertheless, concerns continue.

“We have had some discussions with the developer and we are aware of the changes that they made in response to their meeting with the residents and we have heard from a couple of local residents, and received an email from a resident this afternoon and the resident is still not supportive of the site plan application,” said Marco Ramunno, Aurora's Director of Planning, at last Tuesday's General Committee meeting.

The plan is expected to be the subject of further Council consideration this week.

“It fits with our Official Plan, our zoning bylaws, it is allowed to be this way, and I don't know in whose wisdom this area was zoned this way, but as a Council our hands are tied,” said Councillor Wendy Gaertner. “I am thankful for some of the changes the developer has made and that is all I can say on this.”