

Council needs to look at all four corners of Yonge and Murray with Canadian Tire proposal: residents

Aurora lawmakers need to look at future plans for all four corners of Yonge Street and Murray Drive before making a decision on a mixed-use development proposed for the former Canadian Tire site on the intersection's southwest corner.

This was the message delivered to Council last week when plans for two seven-storey blocks with retail on the ground level and, in behind, two further blocks of five-storeys, separated by a linear park. All told, it could bring 900 residential units and 2,400 square metres of retail space to the corner.

But, while the southwest corner was the sole focus for the February 14 Public Planning meeting, residents who came to speak out on the plan said deliberations need to factor in potential redevelopment opportunities across the street in the years and decades ahead.

'This represents a significant development at one of the four corners,' said former Aurora councillor and former Ontario cabinet minister Chris Ballard, who delegated to Council on behalf of the Regency Acres Ratepayers Association. 'In the next few years, Murray and Yonge Street will be developed and our concern is each is considered independent, in a vacuum, from another that there will be incongruity in terms of use, design and density.'

'It's our sense that what the Town should be doing is looking at the four corners right now so it has a better sense in terms of what goes in each of those areas. That's not necessarily tied to what this development is doing, but it concerns us that each corner might look and have radically different purposes.'

These sentiments were echoed by resident Stephanie Allen who said that while she 'realized' Council was only talking about one portion of the area last week, she 'strongly urged' Council to look at the plans 'as a whole' to ensure that 'no opportunities' are missed.

'We as a Town need to do everything we can to plan this smartly,' she said, outlining concerns over the loss of retail space and the density proposed for the potential new builds. 'We have some fantastic businesses at these four corners, businesses that are regularly frequented in person and are important lifelines for all the people and seniors who live in the area.'

'Densification in the area is a great idea if and only if it retains these fantastic drug stores, grocery stores, restaurants, relationships, meeting places, etc., where they are now in their fantastic locations for residents. Adding people to a vibrant community by erasing that vibrant community is clearly the wrong choice. I ask that the Council continue to make me proud and fight as best they can for this goal.'

'Over-intensification' was an issue voiced by resident George Skoulikas, who said it 'does not represent a balanced approach to planning,' leaving him 'extremely concerned about the over-intensification of residential development at the expense of reducing retail and commercial space.'

Offering both a residential and a commerce perspective on a potential loss of retail was Michael Khalil, who is a nearby resident as well as owner of Sparkle Pharmacy, a mainstay of the Aurora Shopping Centre on the northwest corner.

'What concerns a lot of residents is what is going on the four corners of Yonge and Murray, but in my head I know that that is not the purpose of this meeting, so before coming I thought what is the point of discussing it?' he said in his delegation. 'At the same time, as a resident and a business owner I think it is very important to everybody who's here that a lot of us are looking at the long story of what is going to be going on in this corridor.'

'To me it is easy to say, 'Hey, where Canadian Tire, for sure, makes sense. Something is going to be done, progress is going to happen, developments are going to be made.' That makes sense. Then I start to think about what's going on in the four corners? How

is it going to affect my family? I have two young kids. How is it going to affect my business, which I have been working very hard to help grow and service the community??

More concrete plans were needed to address parking, with an emphasis on whatever is ultimately built promotes connectivity and active movement, because many of Sparkle's clients are older and walk to the store.

?If the plan is to make Yonge Street corridor the same as Richmond Hill, as congested as Richmond Hill, I am not going to enjoy living right here if you change everything about the way we live in this part of Aurora ? and that includes as a business owner, as a homeowner? I think changing the whole corridor of Yonge Street to be what the Province of Ontario wants it to look like isn't necessarily what's best for the Town.?

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