

Developer hails settlement, residents not so much

By Brock Weir

Aurora Council signing off on a settlement deal over the redevelopment of Highland Gate Golf Course was hailed by the developers last week.

"We're very pleased that Council voted to support the settlement," said Cheryl Shindruk. "We worked through a mediation process with the Town and the Ratepayers Association over the last several months and arrived at what we believe is a very good settlement and we're most pleased that Council voted to support it."

She did, however, take issue with the words of some Councillors who said the settlement was a "sad day for Aurora."

"The Official Plan actually does contemplate the re-designation of these lands," she said. "If you read the policies it does designate them private parkland but it does anticipate that there could be a change of use at some point and it specifies the kinds of things that the Town could ask for as part of an amendment to the Official Plan."

"I take some exception to the comments that they are not consistent with the official plan. Official Plans actually do allow processes for amendments subject to criteria and there are some criteria laid out there in the Official Plan. The key thing was to work with the approval authority and the community in developing a plan that is compatible with the existing community and that is what I believe we have done every step in the process."

Despite the meeting of the area ratepayers last week, many residents have said they are not satisfied with the settlement. One resident, who asked not to be named as encroachment issues are still being worked out, said the residents were "forced into voting for the proposal" as an Ontario Municipal Board was "too daunting and risky."

"Residents were bullied" by an unethical developer throughout the entire process," said the resident in an email. "They were effectively bullied by the OMB, with the fear of an even worse development alternative the OMB could approve next year if it goes to trial. And they were faced with the potential huge cost to fight the OMB at trial (a cost that's astronomical for residents, but a drop in the bucket to developers."

Ms. Shindruk, however, insists all negotiations were carried out in good faith.

"I completely disagree with [those comments]," she said. "There was an opportunity to settle and it was a choice; all the parties came to this process freely, so I do not agree with that whatsoever. I would suggest the parties came together in good faith to work out a settlement."