

FRONT PORCH PERSPECTIVE: More insight on Highland Gate

By Stephen Somerville

My column a couple of weeks back regarding the on-going controversy surrounding the Highland Gate community drew a number of responses from readers.

One person e-mailed me: 'You might also want to discuss the developer using bullying tactics re: encroachments? The proposal in its current form is a complete nightmare for residents and how a developer can go to the OMB (which is not an elected body) is mind boggling.'

I also received the following from Klaus Wehrenberg:

'Hello Stephen.

'Thank you for giving the Highland Gate matter some extra discussion room in The Auroran.

'For your handy reference, I am attaching my alternative proposal, 'Greenways - the Key to Repurposing Highland Gate Golf Course.'

'The Auroran published this proposal as a letter to the editor, at the end of June.

'As evidenced in that proposal, I am not totally opposed to partly developing the lands. However, while I would also welcome no development at all, like so many others - I don't consider that option realistic.

'Highland Gate, as I mentioned in my proposal, is a huge opportunity to let creativity go to work, to end up with a model infill community.

'I am making the assumption that conventional planning rules cannot and will not be applied to whatever will be the outcome, other than the 'absolutely no development' outcome.

'So why not think entirely out-of-the-box, not pay attention to standard development rules, and end up with something all stakeholders can live with.

'With a consensus option on the table, creative thinking can be applied again, to the next stage, with planners, engineers and technicians around the table. We can then find out how that most desirable version can be accommodated, through making pilot style exemptions to standard planning rules.

'As long as the exemptions are technically feasible, and within all applicable laws, then everybody should be happy.

'At this time the only stakeholders are deemed to be the proponent, the Highland Gate Ratepayers Association (HGRA), and the condo groups. In reality, Aurora's residents at large, and the Yonge Street business community are also major stakeholders. They need to be in on the discussions, and will no doubt increase the creative juices at work.

'It may be that the proponent is not willing to sit down with all of the stakeholders, in one room, to arrive at a mutually satisfactory solution, based on consensus decision making. But I believe all parties cannot be certain about being winners at an OMB hearing - so should more than welcome this consensus building option.

'The proponent has gone to great lengths to resolve individual concerns, but the resolutions of those concerns can be left until later. There may be a way to deal with most categories of individual concerns in an all-encompassing way, as part of the consensus approach.

'The HGRA has talked about being in the middle of developing an alternate proposal, but has yet to publish one. If no such alternate proposal is on the table by the time the OMB pre-hearing takes place (likely in February), then I am afraid that the OMB hearing will be set up with only two options on the table, the proponent's and the Town of Aurora's (presumably against any development).

'Lastly, let me briefly touch on the parkland dedication issue. The Planning Department has not allowed the comments of the Parks & Recreation Department's staff to become public.

'Those comments, to which I gained access, question how the proponent is allowed to count useless acreage as parkland, and also have stated that the proponent's plan is not in compliance with the Aurora Trails Master Plan. Much more attention should be paid to this issue, as it materially affects an area of concern that has always been dear to the Aurora public.

'In my alternative proposal I have suggested the inclusion of greenways, to deal with the parkland dedication and trails issue to a good extent. The issue should be a major one if an alternate proposal based on consensus will be developed.'

Thanks for the e-mails; I very much appreciate the feedback.

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