

## Golf course developers, Council move to ?minimize disruption?

**By Brock Weir**

Municipal staff will have until July 4 to present an outline to Council on how the concerns of neighbours surrounding the former Highland Gate golf course will be addressed before redevelopment goes into full swing.

Council passed a motion from Councillors Wendy Gaertner and Tom Mrakas last week calling on staff to spell out the next steps in the process, before final agreements are signed, ensuring the redevelopments are meeting the terms set forth in various agreements, how residents' concerns will be addressed in a ?timely? manner, the proper communications processes, and how any contraventions will be addressed.

For proponents of the motion it was about Council remaining accountable to the residents of the existing neighbourhood and, while the motion ultimately passed unanimously, some expressed concern that the motion overstepped some of the binding conditions agreed to by Council, residents and developers in the redevelopment's minutes of settlement.

Such concerns were addressed at the podium by Cheryl Shindruk of Highland Gate Redevelopments Inc., who said that since the Minutes of Settlement were formally approved last fall, they have been working with both the Town and Ratepayers to develop measures to ?mitigate? impacts to neighbours.

?Our collective goal is to ensure that any impacts from construction activities are minimized and mitigated and any issues are addressed in a timely manner,? said Ms. Shindruk. ?The Minutes of Settlement require that a construction management plan be prepared for each phase and stage of development plans and that these construction management plans form a schedule to the pre-servicing and subdivision agreements upon execution. Financial securities are provided to the Town for all works carried out on site. About \$1 million has been posted and several more millions will be posted. We are meeting regularly with your staff on project implementation matters and will continue to do so throughout the process.

?We have been guided to date by the commitments made by the parties to the minutes of settlement, the Town's existing protocols and the input of Town Staff and we are confident that the matters outlined in the motion before you this evening are captured by those provisions.?

The one concern was the final report asked for in the motion before final agreements are executed, she added. That is an extra step not anticipated in the Minutes of Settlement and they wanted assurances it would not impact the timing of the development.

This was a concern shared by several Council members who asked for the date of ?June 4? to be put within the motion, but said communication was the ultimate driver.

?To me, it is very simple: as members of council, we have a duty to protect the best interests of our residents and Council and staff have a responsibility to ensure the process goes smoothly with a minimum amount of inconvenience, frustration and intrusion into the lives of residents,? said Councillor Wendy Gaertner in support of her motion, noting Ms. Shindruk's comment that there has been an ?ongoing conversation? with neighbours over the upcoming development.

?The word ?conversation' has been used a lot,? Councillor Gaertner continued. ?I am not looking for conversation; I am looking for from staff a report on what we can do in writing. It is very different and it is very important.?

Added Councillor Mrakas: ?It is not what the developer is going to put in place; this motion is about what is staff going to do to ensure that the mitigation plan and any procedures are going to be followed. What is staff going to do to ensure to our residents and this Council that those procedures are going to be followed??

Another supporter of the Councillors' motion, from the outset, was Councillor Michael Thompson, who said this is ?probably the most significant project the Town will ever see? when it comes to size, scope, and ?potential for disruption? and a little more oversight would not be amiss.

?You look at the issues we've dealt with over this term and the last in terms of Canada Post, the [Joint Operations Centre], the Leisure Complex, and if we have learned anything a little extra due diligence is a good thing,? he said. ?So it is wise for us to get a report to completely understand both for our perspective as well as the residents ? what is going to be done, how is it going to be managed? What's involved in the process? There doesn't seem to be any impact to the developer. It is a two-week turnaround for this report.

?It doesn't say that we have to agree with the report, it doesn't say that we have to approve the report, to enable staff to go forward and sign anything further. I am comfortable with the way it stands. It is a wise move on our part to be completely clear with how we're going to manage this project in conjunction with the developers.?

While the motion passed, other Council members had a degree of skepticism, including Councillor John Abel, who said Aurora

?should be welcoming development in our community and our ratepayers have not expressed any concerns.? In his opinion, the issues raised by Councillors Gaertner and Mrakas had already been addressed by the developers.

Councillor Harold Kim also had his doubts, questioning why this development, in particular, seemed to be singled out.

?I am wary about singling this project out when there have been no indications that we need to highlight this project in particular, given that Highland Gate Developments Inc. has been very cooperative and they have demonstrated over the last few months they have been willing to go above and beyond what is necessary,? he said.

Before Council amended the motion to include the July 4 date, Mayor Geoff Dawe was firmly against the motion. Without a July 4 deadline, he said, things could become very complicated for all parties and could give Council an opportunity to backtrack on the Minutes of Settlement.

In the end, he argued, the redevelopment of Highland Gate in the middle of a stable neighbourhood is not unique in Aurora as the motion suggests.

?We moved into Aurora in 1977 and in 1979 the farmers' field that I moved onto was developed right up against a stable neighbourhood,? said Mayor Dawe. ?In the 1980s, the golf course that we're talking about right now was developed in a stable neighbourhood. There is a development going in right now in northeast Aurora of 109 houses [against a stable neighbourhood in Newmarket] so they do happen. It might be the first of its type on a golf course, but is not the first one going into a stable neighbourhood and it certainly won't be the last.?