

Highland Gate park up for approval

By Brock Weir

After a public open house, plans to transform a 21 acre parcel of land into a showpiece park in the heart of the Highland Gate redevelopment are being readied for Council approval.

Council will take the first steps towards greenlighting the expansive community park at next week's General Committee meeting set for 7 p.m. on Tuesday, June 20.

Starting from Bathurst Street in the west directly into the centre of the former golf course lands, it will be a naturalized complex of trails, ponds and other amenities proponents say will become a valuable community asset.

During an open house in April ? as well as in written submissions in the lead-up to the event ? plans, however, got some mixed reviews from nearby existing residents and the Aurora community as a whole.

Among the amenities which garnered some divided opinions included lighting within the park, with some residents arguing against it and others deeming it essential to both the safety and usability of the park; the locations and sizes of trails; the maintenance and restoration of existing and new on-site ponds; the number (and very existence of) playgrounds; exercise stations, and shade structures.

The look and feel of the trails, along with the ponds, playgrounds, shade structures, pedestrian underpasses, landscaping and park maintenance are all items that have been considered and included in the Minutes of Settlement over the golf course redevelopment. The Minutes of Settlement sets out what has been agreed upon between the developer, Highland Gate Developments Inc., the Town of Aurora, area ratepayers and the Ontario Municipal Board, and was executed at an OMB hearing last fall.

With these minutes in place, however, it will be very difficult for Council next week to propose changes that are particularly different from what is currently on the table.

?The conceptual parkland design presented at the Public Open House includes the requirements agreed to in the signed minutes of settlement,? said Sara Tienkamp, Acting Manager of Parks for the Town of Aurora. ?The Minutes of Settlement contain a provision that the parties all agree to act reasonably and cooperate with each other in order to implement the Minutes of Settlement. If Council chooses to make changes to the conceptual parkland design that are in direct conflict with the requirements set out in the Minutes of Settlement, then it may be argued that the Town is not acting reasonably and is not cooperating with the other parties.?

The Minutes are able to be renegotiated, she added, but with the approval of Highland Gate Developments Inc (HGDI), the Highland Gate Ratepayers Association, and other stakeholders.

?Staff and HGDI have completed a thorough public consultation process for input on the Conceptual Highland Gate Parkland Design, resulting in extensive comments from neighbouring residents and the [Trails and Active Transportation Committee]. The majority of the comments in opposition of select amenities are contrary to the Minutes of Settlement agreed upon by the Town of Aurora, HGDI and the HGRPA. As such, it can be concluded that the conceptual design presented at the April 5, 2017 Open House be approved by Council and included in the Subdivision Agreement.?