

Motion aims to 'minimize disruption' in Highland Gate redevelopment

By Brock Weir

A subdivision being built in the middle of a long-established residential neighbourhood is not a new thing in Ontario, but it's a first for Aurora and a motion before Council last week seeks to 'minimize disruption' for current residents of Highland Gate.

Brought forward by Councillors Wendy Gaertner and Tom Mrakas, they say 'Council has a duty' to do everything in its power 'to protect our residents by ensuring that this construction is accomplished as smoothly and respectfully as possible.'

Should the motion pass this week, it will call on staff to draft a report 'outlining measures' that can be taken to ensure the Town has the ability 'in writing' to make sure, among other things, that a staff member is made the point person to address residents' concerns, a time frame in which they need to respond, communications with residents, and ensuring that all conditions are met prior to and during construction.

'A year and a half ago, when I saw what these residents were going to have to go through and live through during this construction period, I put myself in their place and I just thought it was going to be so horrible for them,' says Councillor Gaertner. 'We really need to think this through and really plan it properly.'

Adds Councillor Mrakas: 'This is a pretty unique situation in that we have a full-out subdivision development going in the middle of a stable neighbourhood. Councillor Gaertner and myself feel there is a need to make sure that when construction does begin everything be in place to ensure that all the construction, dust, dirt, noise, make sure all our policies and our construction mitigation plan be adhered to and that way there will be the least amount of disruption for the area.'

Looking at similar infill builds, Councillor Mrakas says the motion is founded on concerns voiced in other jurisdictions.

'It is a bit of a challenge to mitigate the disruption to the neighbourhood and that is the main focus of the motion, and also to make sure that everyone understands who they contact and who that main point of contact would be within the Town if they do have any issues, complaints, or any situations that arise, people are fully aware of who they are supposed to contact. We want to make sure we have that communication plan out there that this is who gets contacted,' he says.

'Down the road, what we would like to see once the construction gets going, is to possibly have a communication piece where maybe the ratepayers and the developer and the Town meet on a regular basis so that any concerns can be looked at, talked about, rectified and come up with some solutions that everything does go as smooth as possible.'

Since issues were resolved between the existing residents and the developers, Highland Gate Redevelopments Inc. ahead of a final Ontario Municipal Board hearing, which subsequently approved the application, the primary outstanding bone of contention has been around the development of parkland which is intended to be a special feature within the new community.

The park plan is set to be examined by Council sitting at the committee level next Tuesday.

'I really hope that Council will be on board with this motion because, at the end of the day, we're elected to serve the residents and there has never been any development like this and the extensive development in a stable neighbourhood,' says Councillor Gaertner. 'We're elected to protect these residents and make it as smooth as possible. We know that construction is never really smooth!'