

Potential high-rise on Wellington Street sparks Council action

Any plans for a 12+ storey high rise on Wellington Street East have been temporarily frozen by Council pending ?fulsome examination? of the issue.

In contention is a move by the Province of Ontario to amend the Regional Official Plan to set a ?minimum 12-storey building height? for a development project on the southwest corner of Wellington Street East at Leslie.

The changes, Council contends, were handed down from the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing without any consultation with the lower levels of government.

Council responded at a Special Council meeting held Tuesday, November 22, by passing an Interim Control Bylaw (ICBL) that would ?temporarily prohibit? development on the parcel of land until the Town can have a ?more fulsome examination of the appropriate use, density, and height for the land.?

All of these issues were on the table this past spring when Council rejected a proposal for the same quadrant ? but, at that time, it was a plan for a seven-storey block.

Convening last week, Council members questioned how the Minister made his decision to change the targets for one specific block in Aurora.

?When it came to us, this Council stood strong and opposed that application,? said Councillor John Gallo of the original seven-storey proposal. ?Now what we have is a Minister that feels they know better than us around the table, the staff, public?and has circumvented the entire process and has given them the green light, and you can bet that they're going to appeal whatever we're doing tonight. This to me just stinks and I don't know how this developer is managing to get such a smooth, clear path to this development, but they've managed it.?

?I am not going to sit back and watch it happen and not have the public understand the entire process this took and how off the rails this took, and the impact that if this moves forward will have on the community,? Councillor Gallo concluded.

Councillor Michael Thompson said he shared in the ?disappointment?, ?outrage?, and was a ?little bit flabbergasted by the process in which this comes to us.?

Speaking in support of the motion for the ICBL, he said he wanted Council's opposition reflected in writing to the Minister, Premier Doug Ford, and MPP Michael Parsa.

?There was no communication, no collaboration, no consideration?to say this was even on the radar,? said Councillor Thompson. ?When we look at the various levels of government, we always talk about the fact we need to work in concert with one another to help resolve and move forward on issues and this was not the case. I think a letter needs to be sent officially from the Town and all of Council expressing exactly what we're saying here tonight, demanding an explanation. We need to understand how this came about and why.?

Council duly agreed to send the letter on the issue, which Councillor Ron Weese described as an ?outrageous overreach on behalf of the province.?

This was a view shared by Mayor Tom Mrakas who said it ?boggles the mind? why the Minister would ?cherry pick? a property that is outside the Town's designated Major Transit Station Area.

?Why this one? What's the reasoning? What's the logic behind this? It makes absolutely no sense, it's absolutely unacceptable for the

Minister of Municipal Affairs to be dealing as a Town planner instead of doing his job as the Minister,? said Mayor Mrakas. ?They need to be dealing at a macro level while we deal at a micro level. I am hopeful that maybe we will get an answer and hear what their rationale was for this. To this day we have not received anything, no explanation, but we need to do what we can do, use the tools that are afforded to us.

?The (ICBL) is one tool that is available for us to implement this Interim Control Bylaw to freeze any development on this parcel of land while we study this and find out just what happened.?

Town Planner Marco Ramunno noted that since Council rejected the original proposal of seven storeys earlier this year, that plan was duly appealed to the Ontario Land Tribunal, with the first case management conference on the file scheduled for this Thursday, December 1.

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter