

Townhouse approval on Metcalfe backtracked pending word from Province

By Brock Weir

A proposed townhouse development on Metcalfe Street will have to simmer on the backburner a bit longer after Council backtracked on forwarding the application onto the next level last week.

Going into Council last Tuesday night, Council was poised to accept a zoning bylaw application which would have paved the way for the sale of three homes just west of the GO Station which would have, in turn, set the wheels in motion for an application to replace the three homes with 15 townhouse units to hit the public planning process.

Had Council ratified the decision they had made at the previous week's General Committee meeting, the application for the zoning bylaw amendment would have been accepted by staff, thus allowing it to proceed through normal channels.

It is a proposal that has been making its way through Town Hall for over the year and has been subject to some revisions following concerns raised by neighbours, but by the time the originally-proposed plan for 24 stacked townhouses was presented last week, it had been adjusted down to a 15 unit development of single dwellings.

?The rationale to accept the Zoning Bylaw Amendment application is that the proposal is an infill residential development within the Stable Residential designation and conforms to our use of the Official Plan,? said Heritage Planner Jeff Healey in his report to Council. ?It is noted that the current proposal is a revision of the previous proposal in order to reduce scale and the number of dwelling units.

?Upon submission of a new complete zoning bylaw amendment application, staff will undertake a review of built form and compatibility of the proposed development to determine conformity to all policies [in the] Official Plan.?

But, despite their initial approval to accept the application on February 20, this changed last week following an announcement from the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing regarding Bill 139, a bill which has led to the dismantlement of the Ontario Municipal Board in favour of sweeping changes which will invest municipalities with a greater say in how they are developed. Bill 139, which received Royal Assent in the Ontario Legislature this winter, replaces the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) with a Local Planning Appeal Tribunal, the intent of which is a ?faster, fairer, more affordable? alternative to address area planning disputes, keeping things largely arm's length from the government.

Since its passage in December, however, details on just what the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal will entail have been scant, but last week's announcement promised clarity within weeks.

?I think we all received an email from the Minister of Municipal Affairs in regards to Bill 139 and it will take effect by April 3 and the regulations that are still not out will be coming out, so I just want to reiterate what I said last week,? Councillor Tom Mrakas told his Council colleagues last week ahead of the final vote. ?I would prefer to err on the side of caution as far as the regulations and wait until they are out before we start lifting the two year moratorium on some of these applications coming forward.?

Ultimately, the majority of Council agreed.