

Back to the drawing board for plaza after Promenade dispute

By Brock Weir

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Developers with long-held plans to build a plaza at the northeast corner of Wellington Street East and John West Way could once again be sent back to the drawing board after Council rejected their latest plans.

It was the latest in a long line of presentations made by Council by Perwick Investments for the property located within the Aurora Promenade.

The new plan addressed many of the key concerns addressed by Council including a predominant mix of professional office space rather than strictly retail, and the configuration of the building. Their proposal in relation to Aurora's New Promenade Plan, however, remains the sticking point.

Poor soil conditions in the area have made certain conditions within the promenade hard to accomplish, say developers. In the Promenade Plan, new buildings are required to be at least two storeys tall with its frontage directly onto the road and sidewalk with parking situated behind the building. But the condition of the land makes these options economically unviable.

Their new plan came forward as a compromise. While parking was still situated in the front of the single storey building, it had the façade of a two storey building, complete with windows, to give the impression of plan conformity. Councillors, however, were unmoved by the concessions.

"I appreciate the work that is being done and one of the concerns that was brought up was addressed, at least visually," said Councillor John Gallo. "I think everyone at the Council table shared the concern over the fact the building does not comply with the Promenade Study and I have not seen any arguments to say to me that this is alright because of x, y and z.

"That may be insignificant for some people, I hope it isn't, and I think a unified voice will once and for all, send a message to the developer that we spent years putting forward a promenade study and if we don't stick our heels in the ground and say this is what we want, it opens up the door to many applications saying we don't have to comply."

According to Councillor John Abel, however, it is important for developers to come forward and create businesses and some allowances have to be made on a particularly "difficult" piece of land.

"This is at the very extreme [of the Promenade] and my message is not that you have to follow exactly as we say or don't bother, but let's talk," he said, noting he believed the Promenade Plan to be a "guideline."

This isn't so, said Councillor Paul Pirri, it is a planning document and what you expect to see. With that being said, one has to make allowances for the quality of the land.

"It is not fair to us to impose something on a developer where the site does not make sense for rules around town," he said. "This is probably one of the best outcomes for this site. Is it the same expectations I would have for the northwest corner of Yonge and Wellington? Not at all. But I think in this location and this site, having one row of parking is permissible and I will be supporting it tonight for those reasons."

Councillor Evelyn Buck voted against the plan. Taking issue with the façade, she said that it might look better but it doesn't fulfil the purpose of why that stipulation was included in the promenade plan in the first place, and that is to bring in additional tax revenue and jobs.

"I can't support it without being satisfied it is not possible it can't be more than one storey," she said. "I want something more than a

façade.?

Mayor Geoffrey Dawe, along with Councillors Abel and Pirri were the only three that voted in favour of the plan. The Mayor said the development group had been good working through Council's concerns but something had to give.

?I think the building looks good, I have no issue with the façade, and I think it is better than some of the stuff that we have,? he said.
?It is not substantially different from what we have on the other three corners, so it certainly would not be out of place with what we have.?