

Centre Street development may not be purpose-built rentals after all

As the Town of Aurora continues its work to address the housing crisis, a multi-level housing proposal for the Centre Street and Industrial Parkway neighbourhood might not include purpose-built rentals as originally proposed.

The potential reconsideration was brought to light at last week's Public Planning meeting as Council considered the redevelopment of 180 and 182 Centre Crescent. On the table was a proposed zoning bylaw amendment which would change lot coverage, yard setbacks, parking requirements, and more.

Currently occupied by two single-detached homes, the proposal includes a seven-storey apartment building with 193 units, 250 parking spaces spread through two levels of underground parking, two outdoor amenity areas, all accessed off of Industrial Parkway North.

"No comments have been received from the public regarding the proposed planning application," said staff in a report before Council. "Staff received several oral comments from the public at the June 22, 2023 Community Information Meeting [and feedback included]: concerns over increased density and the associated increased traffic and risk of accidents for pedestrians; provision of control rental units for the development; access coordination with adjacent development at 180 Wellington Street; and the future Metrolinx double rail track."

One resident weighed in at the September 12 meeting, with his concerns relating to multiple construction projects going on in the northern two quadrants of Industrial Parkway and Wellington and the disruption that could potentially cause existing residents.

These were concerns shared by Ward 4 Councillor Michael Thompson who said the Centre Crescent proposal, the multi-level condo planned for the northeast corner, and ongoing work by Metrolinx on the GO Corridor could turn out to be "the perfect storm."

"While I know we will try everything we can to coordinate it with the best of intention, we have to make sure there is no perfect storm and all three don't occur at the same time," he said. "This is a major crossroads throughout the Town and to have all the projects, even if they are at different stages, will create a huge impasse in this part of Town."

Marco Ramunno, Aurora's Director of Planning, replied that it's "always a concern" when the Town looks at development applications like these and he said his department "will work towards ensuring we can mitigate concerns [in] that intersection and the community in general."

In response to the resident's query of whether the building, once completed, would offer subsidized housing, Ramunno said it wasn't a requirement but "the applicant has indicated their intention is to move forward with a purpose-built rental building."

"Things might change moving forward, but I think their goal here, and the Town's goal with respect to this intensification area around the GO Station" is to provide a variety of different housing uses and types."

But, before the end of the meeting, consultants steering this project began to cast doubt on whether this purpose-built rental future would become a reality.

"When we started this project, it was intended to be a rental project," said the consultant, addressing Council. "I don't need to tell you how financing and the financial world has changed in the last six months and may continue to change? it is still our hope to be able to do a rental building, but if interest rates persist at the high level they are at, that may be something we'll have to reconsider."

"I want to make sure Council doesn't bank on the fact this will definitely be 193 units of rental. It will be a 193-unit building, plus or minus pending a staff review ? [but] we can't fully commit to it being 100 per cent rental. If it is a rental building?we will not be applying to the Government for any subsidized units."

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter