

Construction on next phase of seniors residence underway, but neighbours worry about noise

By Brock Weir

Work on the next phase of a seniors' housing complex in east Aurora will continue after neighbouring residents raised concerns of ongoing noise late into the night.

Council has approved a noise exemption request from York Region Christian Seniors Homes at 440 William Graham Drive, off Leslie Street, just north of Wellington, that will allow construction for the pouring and finishing of cast-in-place concrete slabs necessary for the seven-storey building.

Concrete finishing for cast-in-place construction is common practice and requires significant time for the required end product, said Techa van Leeuwen, Aurora's Director of Corporate Services, in a report to Council. The [construction of the slabs] requires significant time to achieve a quality product. The [pouring] of a large slab can take several hours which will occur during the day. The concrete then requires time to cure and properly set. Once the concrete has set enough to walk on it, the power trowelling can commence. The trowelling will occur in the evening and into the early morning hours.

The expected timeframe for completion of the slabs is September of 2019.

Their request, she added, was standard practice and has occurred in Aurora on many recent large-scale builds, including the Centro condominium development at Yonge and Centre Streets.

During the construction of Centro, a similar request was made to Council through a delegation, she continued. At the time, Council delegated the authority to staff to approve the ongoing noise exemption for the duration of the construction project. A process was established with the construction company when they provided Notice to the Town on a regular basis of when the finishing of the slabs would be occurring. Ongoing communication was key to ensuring the Town and surrounding residents were aware of the construction activities.

Nevertheless, the noise exemption application saw both opponents and proponents make their respective cases to Council.

Opposing the application was area resident Paul Reid who said he and his neighbours had concerns not only with noise into the night but the duration of the work. He asked for the application to be rejected outright in favour of having the builders carry out their work within the parameters of Aurora's existing noise bylaws.

The following week, the pro-camp had their say, with the York Region Christian Seniors Homes represented at the podium by Larry Dekkema. Mr. Dekkema fleshed out the plan for Council and provided details on the specific times they expected to be carrying out their work.

Based on the information before them, Council voted to grant the noise exemption request, but the decision was not unanimous.

Councillor Wendy Gaertner said she was speechless at the move.

It is very concerning to me that we will be granting a process that is going to go for eleven months [and] cause noise after 7 p.m. until, perhaps, 3 a.m., she said. I don't think it is fair to the residents. I think we're allowing construction companies to profit either financially or through convenience at the expense of our residents.

The Councillor questioned whether or not it was possible for the concrete to arrive on site earlier or, at the very least, that work commence earlier in the day, but she was told by Ms. van Leeuwen that concrete was a finicky process and it was not possible to alter the schedule.

I am voting against this in principle because we're just asking way too much from our residents in order to build a structure that may or may not benefit the community, but is certainly not benefiting the residents, said Councillor Gaertner.

Other lawmakers, however, said they were comfortable moving forward and did not believe it would cause excessive noise in the surrounding community.

I am very familiar with this process and the noise it make, said Councillor John Gallo. I didn't have a problem with it last week. I had more of an issue with the ancillary noise prior to seven or after 11. This is not the first time we're doing this [and] buildings I am sure will be coming down the pipe [that] will require this. I am not concerned about the noise level because I have heard them in Downtown Toronto and I really don't know if there is an alternative. If we're allowing multi-storey buildings, they really have no other choice but to do this.

Added Councillor Harold Kim: I don't recall any residents coming to Council complaining about Phase 1. I am pretty satisfied [from that experience] that it will continue to have the same process in place for Phase 2.

Councillor Michael Thompson said he too was satisfied, but sought assurances that bylaw officers were prepared to be on site to

ensure compliance with noise standards. Ms. van Leeuwen said bylaw officers had been on site 'continuously' in the lead-up to Council's decision and they were satisfied with compliance.

'It has been stated already that this is standard practice for a building of this magnitude,' said Councillor Thompson. 'We approved this building, so I will be supporting what is in front of me.'