

Council considers site plan to add two storeys to Wellington Street apartments

At the Public Planning meeting held on April 15, Councillors reviewed a zoning by-law amendment proposal that would permit the owner of the apartment buildings at 14 and 18 Wellington Street East to construct two additional storeys atop the southern building at 14 Wellington Street.

According to the proposal, this expansion would increase the number of units in the south building from six to fifteen, bringing the total number of units across the complex to 33.

Situated within both Regional and Local corridors and offering convenient access to public transit, the site appears to align with the Town's Official Plan. The plan prioritizes increased housing density in such areas and aims to boost the availability of rental units in Aurora.

Despite this alignment, local residents voiced several concerns regarding the proposed redevelopment, particularly around parking availability and tenant rights.

Maya Schlegel, who resides directly across from the parking lot shared by the 14 and 18 Wellington Street buildings, noted that the lot is frequently at capacity, as it serves not only building residents and their guests but also nearby commercial visitors.

Notably, the redevelopment would reduce the total number of parking spaces from 40 to 31, eliminating nine spaces while adding nine residential units.

Marco Ramunno, the Town's Director of Planning Services, clarified the rationale behind the request, stating, "our parking standard within our Official Plan in this area of Town has been reduced to 1 space per unit with the provision that there could be a further reduction depending on location being close to public transit, and this being at the corner of Yonge and Wellington, it would meet those criteria."

Beyond parking, long-term resident Nada Ismail, who has lived at 14 Wellington Street South for 20 years, raised issues regarding the property's condition and also expressed concerns about how existing tenants would be protected from rent increases or eviction during the redevelopment process.

Her concerns were echoed by Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese, who questioned project lead planner Michael Smith about the measures the owner would take to ensure minimal disruption to current tenants during the renovations.

Mr. Smith responded, "I will take that up with [the owner], it's a very important point. And as [Marco Ramunno] pointed out, we're subject to [Town rental occupancy standards], and we're going to have to turn our minds to that and I think the sooner the better and I will make sure we get you that information before the zoning goes through."

Under the Tenant Residency Act, current tenants would likely need to be temporarily relocated.

As of now, no relocation plan has been submitted.

"I'm almost speechless," said Ward 2 Councillor Wendy Gaertner. "I think we're coming on to six months [since Council received the] complete proposal. Surely the owner and the architects have been working on this for quite a while. Words like, 'I imagine the residents will be taken care of' that's not what I want to hear, I want to hear what the plan is. These are the owner's residents. He needs to have a plan for them."

She added, "It really does concern me that we're going to be allowing the owner to build a lot more units and the ones that he now owns are not being taken care of properly."

Mayor Tom Mrakas closed the planning meeting by addressing Mr. Smith, emphasizing the importance of a clear strategy: ?as Councillor Gaertner and Councillor Weese mentioned, it's absolutely vital that there be a relocation plan available to this Council as well as to the residents by the time we get to Committee, otherwise I think you'll see a different tone around this table.?

Council unanimously voted that the concerns raised during the statutory Public Planning meeting be addressed by Planning and Development Services in a report to a future Committee of the Whole meeting.

By Selena Loureiro