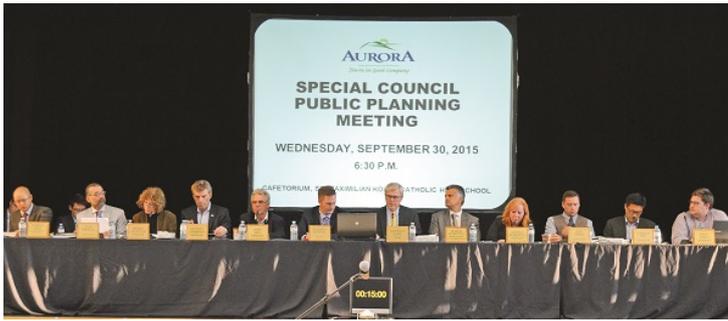


Council rejects \$98.1 million Highland Gate offer



By Brock Weir

Highland Gate Developments' offer to sell the defunct Highland Gate golf course lands to the Town of Aurora for \$98.1 million has been rejected by Council.

Council turned down the offer in a 5 - 3 vote. Dismissing the offer, Councillor Tom Mrakas, one of the five voting in favour of rejecting it outright, called the overture an "insult" both to the Town and its residents. Mayor Geoff Dawe, along with Councillors Harold Kim and Paul Pirri, however, voted against the rejection to keep the doors open for further dialogue between the developers, the Highland Gate Ratepayers' Association and the Municipality before a late January deadline set by the landowners. Councillor Wendy Gaertner was not present at the meeting.

The offer came Friday.

In a statement, Highland Gate Developments said a purchase price of \$98.1 million was calculated by multiplying the developable acreage of the property by the current estimated fair market value of developable lands which, they said, is \$1.5 million per acre.

Of the 101 acres on the property, 65.4 are developable, they said. If accepted, the offer made to the Mayor and members of Aurora Council [on Friday] would end the proposed development of the property and effectively cancel an appeal to the Ontario Municipal Board filed by the developer.

Speaking to The Auroran on Monday, Cheryl Shindruk of Highland Gate Developments said this is just giving the public what they want.

There have been calls from the community throughout the process for the Town to buy the land and maintain it as a park, so we felt it was appropriate to see if that is, in fact, what the Town would like to do, she said. If they are intending to do that, or are interested in doing that, this is the price at fair market value.

We're just interested in getting an answer to that question that has already been put out several times by members of the community and it still continues to be a question that is out there. I think everyone needs to know one way or another what the answer would be.

In their statements, they added they have already spent \$4 million on the application, including consulting and legal fees, and are not seeking to be reimbursed for any of these costs.

According to the developers, the Town must make a decision by the end the business day on January 22. If it is not accepted, the developers' appeal to the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) filed last month to press for a resolution on their development proposal for 184 homes and a 10-storey condominium complex will move full steam ahead.

?That is a reasonable timeframe, it works out to about six weeks, and it gives Council time to consider it,? said Ms. Shindruk.

Before Tuesday's Council meeting, however, the Highland Gate Ratepayers, however, still need time to digest the proposal.

?It is a big ticket item! Have you got any money in your pocket?? said Dave Newton, President of the Ratepayers Association. \$98 million is an awful lot of money. I think we will have to take a consensus, but I think it is a little bit richer than what we anticipated.?

Geranium, he said, was clearly working with a different model on how to value the property in question, then the baseline the Ratepayers were using to develop their counterproposal, he said. They hoped to present this proposal to Highland Gate Developments at their scheduled meeting last week, but Mr. Newton said that meeting was cut short.

?It was a little bit disappointing, but it is a process,? he said. ?We are hoping that opportunity will be presented in the near future. My initial thought on [the \$98.1 million offer] is it is more expensive than what we had considered in the model we were using, so we're going to have to form a consensus amongst the community to see what the next steps are.

?This is a valuation Geranium presented to us as standard industry [valuation] and that is how they came up with the number. There is a delta between [their proposal and our counterproposal] and we are hoping we can come to some sort of meeting of the minds, but at this point in time that delta is pretty far apart.?

In Tuesday's vote, Councillors also voted to retain legal counsel and experts to represent the Town at the OMB appeal.