

Council wants "meaningful change" on Highland proposal

By Brock Weir

Developers looking to transform the former Highland Gate golf course into a housing development of over 180 detached units and a 10-storey condo complex are looking to Council for next steps by December, but faced a potential roadblock from lawmakers last week, who said they want as long as it takes to make the right decision for the community.

The comments were made at a public planning meeting last Wednesday devoted to this redevelopment project. Don Given, a consultant retained by Geranium Homes to steer the development through Council, reiterated his position that the proposed development has met the test of relevant agencies and peer reviewers, and now it is up to Council to make the decision.

"To implement the process, we met with your staff in what they call a 'pre-application' meeting and they provided us with a very comprehensive list of all the different types of studies needed to be submitted to support the application," Mr. Given told Council. "We did that. It constituted several binders submitted with our application and it was one of those documents that you peer reviewed. The application itself conforms with the intent of the official plan, which is private open space may be redeveloped provided you follow those steps."

Conflicts with the existing condominium over the proposed new building were soon to be hammered out, he added, noting incoming trails systems would be 85 per cent off-road connecting Yonge Street to Bathurst, and discussions are ongoing with the Highland Gate Ratepayers' Association.

Residents in the group put forward a range of concerns he said were not "insurmountable" and between them established an "aggressive timetable" to deal with those issues. As such, he proposed an equally aggressive timetable to Council.

"We are very pleased with where we are and I would urge you that when you are looking at where we are after tonight's discussion to request your staff to bring forward a recommendation report not to be tabled with your Council until after December 1, but to start preparing that report and do whatever is necessary to secure a date and do whatever public notices are necessary to ensure we have a full public meeting. You have been given a status report. You have not yet received an opinion from staff on this application and we urge you to get on with that."

Council, however, wants developers to get on with addressing the concerns of residents. Despite these concerns being vented at three public planning meetings devoted to the proposal, few of these issues had been tackled, and fewer still concretely addressed through "meaningful change" within the proposal "and that has to happen first."

"At the last meeting, there were a number of pretty specific concerns I had and requested more information," said Councillor Jeff Thom, supporting a motion from Councillor Sandra Humfryes calling for another public planning meeting to seek these answers. "I can say for myself, and I hope everyone at this table, that we are with the residents. We are residents of the Town ourselves. Residents can be assured we do take this very seriously and we are on your side."

While Councillor John Abel called for a "complete turnaround" in getting these issues addressed, Councillor Michael Thompson said neighbours were feeling "frustrated" with the process.

"Many residents came here tonight and expressed their frustration that they feel they have done their job, they have come out, they have been engaged, they have submitted their comments, they have spoken up about their concerns but they don't feel they are necessarily being heard," he said. "We have heard over and over tonight that there hasn't been meaningful change or revisions to address some of these concerns. While I am glad to support [another meeting] because it sounds like there may be some issues being addressed, I think the expectation of myself and those around this table and here in this room is that at the next public planning meeting there will be some meaningful change and revision to this plan."

?Disappointment? was shared by Councillor Tom Mrakas who said everyone was in favour of ?small growth?, but it has to be on Aurora's terms, through the parameters outlined in official planning documents and Aurora's vision for itself. He echoed the call for ?meaningful modifications? to move forward, but if those don't come, he said he doesn't see a way through.

Councillor Wendy Gaertner expressed similar sentiments, saying answers need to be ready before the next meeting so residents' time is not ?wasted.? The Town needs to stand by its own planning principles, she contended.

?As has been said here, the timing has to suit us and not the developer,? she said.

A date for the next Public Planning meeting is being eyed for the second half of January.