

Developers pledge to work towards solution for Ridge Road proposal

Developers behind a proposal to demolish a home on Ridge Road and build five new homes in its place pledge to work with the Town to address community concerns following a Public Planning meeting last week.

At issue is an application to rezone 107 Ridge Road, in the northwest quadrant of Yonge Street and Bloomington Road, for five residential lots and establish an Environmental Protection Area in its place.

The lot in question is 0.39 hectares at the southwest corner of Ridge Road and Glensteep Trail and is currently designated as Estate Residential and Environmental Protection Plans under the Town's existing Official Plan and the Town's Yonge Street Secondary Plan, known as OPA #34.

Nearby residents who delegated to Aurora's April 21 Public Planning meeting were unanimously opposed to the plan, citing incompatibility with the surrounding low-density neighbourhood and the impact of the proposal on environmentally-sensitive Oak Ridges Moraine lands.

These views were largely shared by Council members who said more work needed to be done on the file.

They rejected staff recommendations to advance the file to a future Committee of the Whole meeting for further consideration and possible enactment in favour of a future Public Planning meeting to address the cited concerns.

"It's really about the Moraine," said Ward 3 Councillor Wendy Gaertner, stating it would be precedent-setting for the Town of Aurora had the application moved forward as-is. "If we approve this, we will be guilty of slicing the Moraine, and it's so important that the Provincial Government passed the Oak Ridges Moraine Act and we have it as a special section in our OP. Please, please respect what the Moraine and what Provincial Planning is and did try to do."

These were views shared by Ward 4 Councillor Michael Thompson who said he met with concerned residents the weekend prior to the Public Planning meeting, and their worries included conformity, density, and OPA #34.

"Councillor Gaertner and the residents are right that this sets a dangerous precedent," said Councillor Thompson. "Enabling people to change that zoning from Estate Residential to Suburban is a significant change and it opens the door to further higher-density development that is not contemplated within OPA #34. We created that vision, we just upheld that vision when we approved the Official Plan, and its incumbent upon us to stick to it."

Councillor Thompson said his preference was to bring the issue back to a future Public Planning meeting to let staff and the applicant to work together "to find something that may be suitable."

"Ridge Road was meant to stay as Estate Residential within our vision. If we're going to contemplate making any changes whatsoever, then look at it in its totality. Don't look at it lot by lot and have a haphazard approach to the planning of this area. Let's do a study, let's figure it out, engage the residents, and be able to chart what the future of Ridge Road should look like."

While Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland said higher density proposals in Aurora's south end are "encroaching far more into the Oak Ridges Moraine," she said encroachment onto Ridge Road would be "opening a whole can of worms that was not intended for this community at all."

Following questions from Ward 5 Councillor John Gallo, the applicant said their "preference" is to work with Municipal staff to find address the identified issues, "that I can guarantee you," rather than taking the matter to the Ontario Land Tribunal for a decision.

"We are well aware of what our options are and, you're absolutely right, we could do that tomorrow, but?..we would like to see that

fulsome set of review comments back to us, and then we will take a look at what we heard tonight, what we're hearing from our neighbours, and then we will continue to work with staff on a very collaborative basis," they said. "Obviously we're hoping to have a Committee of the Whole meeting before Council recesses, but, again, we'll play that as the issues come by and the comments are received."

The "willingness" of the applicant to work with staff and residents was cited by Mayor Tom Mrakas as a reason to go back to a Public Planning meeting.

"If we intended on making any changes to OPA #34, we just updated our OP and we would have made changes," he said. "We made changes to heights in certain areas, we made changes to density in certain areas, we didn't change OPA #34 and there's a specific reason to that: because we expect to see that area maintained within that character and within those policies that have been put forward since 2001."

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