

FRONT PORCH PERSPECTIVE: Regarding Highland Gate

By Stephen Somerville

One of the topics covered in my last column was the on-going controversy surrounding the Highland Gate community.

As you may have read, Highland Gate Developments, after Aurora Council turned down its offer to sell the property for \$98M, has taken their case to the Ontario Municipal Board.

This situation was predictable as we have seen this occur before in a number of communities, including Glenway in Newmarket. And the outcome is still the same.

The real estate developer introduces its plan, then they host a couple of community meetings, after which they make small non-material changes to their plans. The revised plans are rebuffed by the community and their elected representatives. Then, at the first opportunity, the developer applies to the Ontario Municipal Board.

The people in the affected community are angry and want the Town to spend a considerable amount of money (usually in the hundreds of thousands of dollars on lawyers) to quash the plan.

Many other people in Town who are not directly affected by the development are also angry, but for a different reason; they don't want to see their elected representatives approve any money to continue the fight.

In the end, two things happen. Either the town doesn't pay and the developer wins or the town continues the fight, loses and the developer still wins.

At the end of my column, I welcomed comments from readers on this topic.

Below is an e-mail that I received from one of the affected homeowners.

?Hi Stephen, I think for the most part you have the story right. Some valuable additional details are that that Highland Gate is significantly different than Glenway. Highland Gate is about 50% on the sensitive Oak Ridges Moraine and the waterways are also protected by the Lake Simcoe Protection Act.

?More specifically, Highland Gate is a golf course that has already once been infilled in about 1989 and because of that it has some inherent challenges with narrow fairways that have required the Developer to make some very creative and questionable design moves to maximize their profit.

?The list seems endless, but some of the more critical are single loaded roads, existing homes will have roads in front, beside and behind, narrow roadways that will not allow for fire trucks to have ample access to turnaround, drainage ditches, ridiculously high retaining walls; some as high as eight meters.

?Many changes that will make these homes significantly different from existing including, not fitting into the existing community, greater lot coverage, reduced setback from property lines, two meters higher than existing, fence heights of 10 feet and many others.

?Additionally the proposed High Rise Condo is 10 stories while the Town maximum is 6 stories, they have included ground floor commercial, in a residential area. Parking is only 50% onsite with the balance across the street.

?Anyone who knows the proposed area and Golf Links-Tim Hortons traffic knows the traffic problems that will result from retail mixed with a 180 high density units.

?From what I understand the Developer has asked the Town for many variances, I don't have the total number but I have heard they number in the area of 70 to 80 different variances.

?If the OMB forces this upon the Town of Aurora our world will change. Aurora will have set a precedent that will make it so every developer in the area will be able to force whatever they wish on our Community.

?Everyone in the province should be paying attention to this as this will mean the end to any ability of a Town to say no to a developer pushing their will on the towns to force development regardless.

?I would suggest you speak to the Highland Gate Rate Payer Association representatives to clarify the facts and ensure you share with the people of Aurora that this is not only a Highland Gate issue but an issue that means an end to their nice quiet little community and a free-for-all for developers.?

Thanks for the e-mail; I very much appreciate the feedback.

I have been giving this issue considerable thought; any more comments from readers would be welcome. I will have more to say about this in future columns.

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