

Gulf remains between Highland developers and Ratepayers

By Brock Weir

It has been over a week since Council turned down Highland Gate Developments' offer to sell the former golf course lands to the Municipality for \$98.1 million, but a gulf still remains in ongoing discussions between the developers and area residents.

Following Council's decision on December 8, talks between Highland Gate Developments (HGDI), a partnership between Geranium Homes and landowner ClubLink, and the Ratepayers are ongoing. While their positions remain far apart, so too are the pages they are reading from.

Last week, the concerns of neighbours surrounding the defunct golf course, which HGDI plans to transform into an 180+ unit housing development and 10-storey condo complex pending a review at the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB), over encroachment issues were voiced by Newmarket-Aurora MPP Chris Ballard, but Cheryl Shindruk, Vice President for HGDI, says her group welcomes continued dialogue with anyone willing to do so.

‘Anyone who wants to contact us wanting to continue discussions, we are more than willing and happy to carry on those discussions,’ said Ms. Shindruk last week. ‘We are preparing for the OMB process and having the pre-hearing, which will be held sometime in the New Year in late February or early March. In the meantime, where there is an interest and a desire by either individual community members of the Ratepayers' Association, those discussions will continue.’

According to Ms. Shindruk, an opportunity presented itself last week for the Ratepayers' to present their counterproposal for the site development, something originally slated for the beginning of December until the scheduled meeting was cancelled when HGDI took their development application to the OMB.

While she this counter proposal was presented, it was done so without prejudice and she was not at liberty to elaborate on any of the details.

Not so fast, said Dave Newton, President of the Highland Gate Ratepayers' Association. A meeting, he said, had taken place, but what was discussed is simply in ‘embryonic’ stages.

‘It was without prejudice and anything we would be presenting that would be accepted would have to be ratified by our membership and it hasn't even reached that stage yet,’ said Mr. Newton. ‘I hope to continue these discussions. The next step is a meeting we have tentatively scheduled towards the end of January to discuss with the members what they are really comfortable with in terms of a counteroffer.’

‘There is a pretty wide delta from what they are asking for and what we're ready to offer, but that being said, we still needed to have everything ratified by the community and the members of the Ratepayers Association, which we didn't even have that opportunity to do. Whatever offer we were preparing really was in embryonic stages. It was really just trying to see if there was some sort of common ground where we could meet the developers at and then subsequently take that back to the membership for their ratification.’

Council voted to reject the offer on a 5 ? 3 vote. Councillor Wendy Gaertner was absent from the meeting. In discussions, Councillor Tom Mrakas characterised the offer as ‘insulting’ to the Town and residents alike.

‘I don't know where his thoughts were coming from,’ said Ms. Shindruk. ‘Our reaction would be it is a reflection of the fair market value, the market value being the price where we could accept someone would pay us for the land today given where it is, the policy framework that pertains to the land and the likelihood of approval.’

‘We continue to believe in the plan and the policy basis for the plan is, in our view, strong. We are very confident as we head to the OMB with this plan, but remain committed to discussing it with the Town, the Ratepayers, and the individual residents.’