

Hollandview Trail residents can weigh in on café proposal next month

By Brock Weir

Residents in Aurora's Hollandview Trail neighbourhood will have a chance to sound off on a proposal to turn the long-vacant Blockbuster Video outlet near Bayview Avenue into a new restaurant with outdoor patio.

The concept to turn the former Blockbuster into a new Symposium Café was held off at last week's Council meeting until a General Committee meeting set for September 7 to give residents an opportunity to consider and digest the restaurant proposal which puts particular emphasis on its outdoor patio.

Symposium Cafés, an offshoot of Sun Life Assurance Company, plans to turn the vacant outlet into its latest café, which focuses on the outdoor-indoor dining concept with a European flavour. To make the concept a reality, however, they need to take up eight existing parking spaces to create their expansive patio, along with landscape work and the installation of outdoor speakers.

Last week, however, Councillors John Gallo, Paul Pirri, and Michael Thompson said they had concerns neighbours had not had enough time to speak out either for or against this proposal.

“Part of the rationale of having a site plan amendment approval by Council is, in my view, one to allow staff to review it and make sure they are all okay with it,” said Councillor Gallo. “The second is to make sure the community is okay with it and that is why we bring it to a public Council meeting. There are many homes abutting [the site plan] and I know for a fact there are residents in that area that are concerned about this. How can I be assured that those residents knew this was going to be before us and had the ability to voice their opinions?”

In response, Marco Ramunno, Aurora's Director of Planning, said residents were involved in the proposal when it was heard at the Committee of Adjustment and further public notice is not required for site plan approval. Councillor Paul Pirri said he was at the Committee meeting in question and was not satisfied that the surrounding community would be on board with the proposal.

“I have attended these cafes in the past, they are phenomenal facilities and I have absolutely no qualms with the organization behind them but my problem is, as it is now, with the proximity of this patio to these units,” said Councillor Pirri. “I can't vote in favour of this because I do have concerns with how this would impact the quality of life of those residents at that location.”

Sharing these concerns was Councillor Thompson, who said neighbours in this area had contacted him with their concerns about noise levels and the size of the patio, which can accommodate up to 80 patrons.

“I want to make sure they have the opportunity to speak,” he said. “There was a concern with how it will impact the surrounding neighbourhood. The noise aspect is a concern. Granted, they have to comply with bylaws, but I share some of the concerns with regards to members of the community not having the opportunity to step forward and at least voice their opinions or concerns.”

Although Councillor Evelyn Buck said she was concerned that neighbours had expressed some reservations about the proposal, she questioned whether Council was the proper place to air them in this case. In this instance, Council's job is to vote on the recommendations made to it by the Committee of Adjustment as residents had their chance to speak at that point, she said. A further option before them would be to take their concerns to the Ontario Municipal Board, which would achieve the objective of delaying things.

“It is time, but it would delay the construction of the patio,” she said. “They would accomplish their objective in going before another impartial body [and] I don't think it is our place to get in the middle of that process. We should fulfil the condition from the Committee of Adjustment. I don't see any other options before us.”