

Neighbours concerns to be addressed as Highland Gate redevelopment inches forward

By Brock Weir

As sales get underway at Allegro, the formal name of the Highland Gate redevelopment, focus will soon turn towards construction and everything that entails for the community.

With developers keen to minimise disruption to the existing community surrounding the infill development, a number of measures have been put in place to meet this goal and make sure things go as smoothly as possible once homes begin to take shape.

According to Cheryl Shindruk, Vice President of Geranium Homes, the company behind Allegro, they plan to commence construction on the first phase of homes this coming Spring with first occupancy in the Spring of 2019.

Phase One consists of the west end of the site roughly between Bathurst Street and Murray Drive.

‘We have commenced earthworks already and we will be doing the site preparation work,’ said Ms. Shindruk. ‘House construction will be driven by the market. Our goal is to be able to sell the homes as quickly as possible and be out of our neighbours’ hair as quickly as possible.’

These were concerns recently addressed at the most recent meeting of Council, with elected members poring over the fine details of conditions agreed to between the Town and the developer.

Among these conditions securities to ensure ‘performance and compliance of all engineering and landscape works’, monitoring the impacts on surrounding water and environmental areas, cleaning external streets of any mud that might be tracked out of the construction site, and making sure topsoil removed from the ground is kept under control.

‘Once we execute a subdivision agreement, the developer is obligated to fulfil the obligations of the agreement,’ said Marco Ramunno, Aurora’s Director of Planning, responding to questions from Councillor Wendy Gaertner. ‘We have also secured a significant amount of money from the developer to ensure that if there are any issues during the construction and servicing phase that they will comply. Based on our experience to date with Highland Gate Developments Inc., and Geranium, they have been very good to work with, very accommodating and working closely with staff, so I don’t foresee any problems with this developer in ensuring the construction phase goes as smoothly as possible.’

Councillor Gaertner nevertheless had a number of concerns, particularly as to the ‘power’ held by Town Staff to ensure the construction goes off without a hitch, particularly from the perspective of residents. Going back to a presentation made earlier in the meeting by Ms. Shindruk outlining a number of the provisions Geranium plans to have in place to address the concerns of neighbours, including a 24/7 phone line, the Councillor sought further information on the parameters on how these concerns will be addressed once reported.

‘What happens if the concerns aren’t addressed to the satisfaction of the residents’ complaining?’ she asked. ‘I don’t know what the process is going to be and I think we need to have it in place and in writing so that not only Council but the residents and staff know, because Council doesn’t want to get calls from the residents saying they made a complaint, somebody listened to them, but nothing was done. We need to protect ourselves ? Council and staff ? by knowing what the process is going to be.’

Mr. Ramunno assured Council there was a protocol in place with the developer.

‘We heard early on that they are keeping track of all the comments, complaints and issues they have received to date through their community hotline,’ said Mr. Ramunno. ‘I think there were a dozen issues and they were all dealt with within a day, so moving forward they will continue to deal with those issues as they come up. Staff, if we do get any complaints, will advise the consulting engineers and ensure that those issues are dealt with as quickly as possible.’

These questioned followed a motion from Councillor Gaertner ? as well as Councillor Tom Mrakas ? calling on staff to spell out the next steps in the process, before final agreements are signed, ensuring the redevelopments are meeting the terms set forth in various agreements, how residents’ concerns will be addressed in a ‘timely’ manner, the proper communications processes, and how any contraventions will be addressed.

‘The Town does have standards and I think Councillor Gaertner and I both wanted to ensure that both the Town is going to do to make sure that those standards are upheld and the developer is going to be held accountable to those standards and we, as a Town are going to do what we can to make sure there is the least amount of disruption to the residents of the community,’ said Councillor Mrakas.

In the end, from Councillor Gaertner’s perspective, the more knowledge Council and the community have, the less likely past mistakes will be repeated.

?Council needs to be in the loop [on monthly meetings between stakeholders], whether it is a member of Council or some members of Council,? she said. ?I think because of past experiences we have had with the JOC (Joint Operations Centre) Council needs to be kept in this monthly loop.?