

New condo plan includes more units, parking

By Brock Weir

It has been hailed as a revitalization project which will do wonders for Aurora's Downtown core ? but area residents looking towards the new Centro Condominium as a much needed shot in the community's arm will have a few more neighbours to contend with. Council approved a zoning amendment for the multi-storey, multi-use condominium this week which will see the previously forecast 74 apartment units and 95 parking spaces expanded to 95 units and 134 spaces.

There are a number of factors that have come into play with the application, say architects. One is the smaller units in the building were snapped up fast compared to larger units, bringing about a reconfiguration of some of their smaller units, and digging a second storey below-ground for parking to contend with poor soil conditions.

?There are a number of different ways to address the mitigation that is necessary,? said Andrea Bourra of the MMM Group on behalf of owners Kaitlin Group. ?One of them is to go an additional storey lower and provide a level of parking as opposed to driving approximately 300 piles into the ground to provide additional support. Driving piles [causes] lots of time, lots of noise, lots of vibrations and the recommendation was to proceed with excavation to the additional level.

Architect Stephen Mak said soils on the planned condo site are ?extremely unstable? and not unlike having a layer of Jell-O below the foundation site.

?Because the Jell-O has compacted the layer below, we now have reasonably solid soil,? he explained. ?By taking out [the layer of Jell-O] it is very much at a similar cost to drive the piles but we get an additional layer of parking, we get better stability within the structure itself, and we don't have the noise and interruptions [that will disturb neighbours].?

Neighbours will also be up in numbers when the building is completed and new tenants start to move in. Approximately 52 units had been sold when architects and planners made their pitch to Council and the lion's share of the remaining units were some of the larger suites.

?The additional units are being created by reconfiguring unsold units and parking stalls within the existing building footprint,? said Ms. Bourra. ?There is no change to the building footprint and the parking is being provided underground. As a result of this approach, there are no fundamental or noticeable changes for the most part to exterior elevations. You would be hard-pressed to take a look at the elevations and really be able to pick up much difference.?

The revised plan largely won the support of Councillors and some neighbours ahead of this week's Council meeting.

?The gestation period on this building seems to be longer than several elephants,? said resident Gordon Barnes. ?The good news is it is finally going to happen and I look forward to my property taxes going up because of its value in the Region.?

Councillor Paul Pirri voiced his support for developers reconfiguring the larger units into smaller dwellings for prospective buyers.

?We always hear the need for more affordable housing,? he said. ?People can't just charge less for housing.

Councillor Evelyn Buck agreed.

?It's a significant location in Aurora and it is certainly going to transform the downtown.?

From a transformational perspective, Councillors Michael Thompson and Wendy Gaertner raised a note of concern. Both had questions of how the additional residents would impact local traffic, including those trying to turn left onto Yonge Street and making traffic problems worse nearby at Yonge and Wellington.

?The traffic is already pretty bad,? said Councillor Gaertner. ?I don't see how we can allow people to make that turn at that time in the morning. I am not going to vote against this, but I see this as potentially a large problem for us.?

Nevertheless, a traffic report had been submitted by the applicant indicating impact on area traffic from the changes would be minimal and the Town's own traffic analyst agreed with their findings, according to Glen Letman, Aurora's Manager of Development Planning.

The plan passed Council on consent.