

Next steps for Highland Gate proposal could come forward in January

By Brock Weir

Aurora Council recently called for 'meaningful changes' to be proposed by developers looking to turn the former Highland Gate Golf Course into a new infill residential community, but lawmakers and residents alike might have to wait until the end of January to see if this bears fruit.

Town Staff are eyeing a further public planning meeting devoted to the controversial plan for either January 21 or January 27 to let all parties speak out about the issue, including the developer, Geranium Homes and the Highland Gate Ratepayers, who have set an early December deadline for their own talks on how to move forward.

The location for the meeting, however, is still up in the air. The sheer number of concerned citizens wanting to take in these meetings have necessitated off-site sessions at St. Maximilian Kolbe Catholic High School to accommodate the numbers, which have, on occasion, topped 300.

At this point, however, it might be too short a turnaround time to secure St. Max again.

'The month of December can be very difficult due to a lot of demand on facilities,' said Town Clerk Stephen Huycke. 'The first meeting took almost two months to make all the necessary arrangements to get that meeting in place and acceptable for that purpose. While we could [make a meeting happen in December] we do not recommend it for numerous reasons. Different parties are continuing to negotiate until the end of November and that will make for an exceedingly tight time frame to report anything, if at all.'

At the last Public Planning meeting held for Highland Gate at the end of last month, Councillor Tom Mrakas suggested a meeting take place within the tighter confines of the Council Chambers in order to make this meeting happen. This idea, however, was met with vocal opposition from those in the crowds.

Whichever date Council and staff settle on for early next year, 2016 is likely to see Councillors meeting more frequently over the summer to tackle their workload. Councillor Michael Thompson's motion to add two further Council meetings on July 23 and August 23 was passed at the Committee level and will come forward to Council for ratification this week.

Councillors typically only have one Council meeting for the months of July and August unless something pressing comes up, but these meetings often lead to mammoth agendas that do not get completed. This is an issue Councillor Thompson has tried to address in the past, but it now seems to have traction.

'You will note there are only 10 items on the agenda this evening and you will note in the summer we typically range between 25 and 30 in the months of July and August,' said Councillor Thompson. 'I come from a retail world where you build your business around the busy months and it seems we need another meeting in the summer to deal with the caseload.'

'[Every year] since I have been on Council we always end up deferring items. I think we're all here to get the business of the Town done and it is necessary to have these meetings. I don't take any pleasure [in it] and I am sure staff don't want to be here and probably don't like the idea, but at the end of the day we need it.'