

Proposed Wellington and Industrial condo development set to offer housing models

A multi-building condominium plan for the northeast corner of Industrial Parkway North and Wellington Street East, could bring additional housing models to the community.

The plan for the former site of Royal Woodworking was reviewed by Council at last week's Public Planning meeting.

The application calls for Official Plan amendments to allow for four apartment-style buildings up to 12-storeys, connected by a two-storey podium, accessed via Industrial Parkway.

The number of units contained in the complex is yet to be finalized, but presently 22 units are dedicated for studios, 703 units of either 1-bedroom or 1-bedroom+den units, 180 2-bedroom and 2-bedroom+den models, and 43 3-bedroom units.

While there has been some question whether these units will be condo or in the style of purpose-built rentals, Ryan Guetter, a consultant appearing on behalf of the applicant, said the specific tenure has not been finalized, but condo was the current thinking.

In our OP (Official Plan) we have the requirement of 25 per cent of them being affordable and we have new guidelines on what affordability is, not necessarily attainability, said Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese, speaking to the consultant. Have you any plans for these units to be affordable, meaning in this community? they are somewhere around \$530,000 to \$600,000 per unit. Is the plan for you to make sure that 25 to 35 per cent of these are affordable?

The consultant told Council the proponents have proposed a shared equity plan to enable members of the community, first-time buyers, to participate in the market with assistance that makes the units certainly affordable.

The shared equity program is a key part of that and there is a willingness to provide that to the community to really assist, Guetter said. It provides for about 10 to 15 per cent towards a first-time homebuyer purchasing a unit and the typical types of models where you see this, there is an expectation that the developer also receives a portion of any lift in value over time, over a two- to three-year period. That is something this particular proponent group is not going to be seeking. Then ultimately it is also an interest-free type of structure, so those are the basic elements. What distinguishes this particular proponent's initiative, my understanding is the proponents, [and] some of them are actually from or live in the Town, are committed to the Town and committed to seeing residents and first-time home-buyers enter into the market here.

Councillor Weese said he was looking forward to hearing more about how that would pave the way for additional affordability. The proposed program also caught the interest of Ward 3 Councillor Wendy Gaertner and Ward 4 Councillor Michael Thompson, who asked for more details on how it would achieve that affordability goal.

We want to be able to provide a wide range, or mix of options for residents and young families, said Councillor Thompson.

Added Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland: I want to commend you for the shared equity program you are offering and personally I thought it was quite intriguing. It does allow for families or young professionals to get their foot in the door, have the opportunity to purchase their first property, which is fantastic. I hope more developers or applicants choose to be very creative in helping people attain their very first homes.

Similar enthusiasm came from Mayor Tom Mrakas, but he stressed the devil was in the details.

We talk about affordability and attainable within our community a lot through every application that comes here, and I'm intrigued as well to learn more about the shared equity aspect of this proposal, he said. I am looking forward as we go through this process

to learn more about that. Once we get those extra reports and studies that we need to make a decision, this Council will make a decision at that time.?

Indeed, the decision coming out of Public Planning was to refer the matter to a future Committee of the Whole meeting. There, concerns such as massing are hoped to be addressed.

?I am in support of bringing it to the Committee of the Whole and have them complete all the various reports and review it at that point and see where we stand,? said Ward 5 Councillor John Gallo. ?Am I entirely comfortable with the density? I don't know; I don't have an issue with the height. I have been consistent throughout my political career that if you want to curb urban sprawl you put density around public transportation corridors and that's exactly what this is.?

Added Ward 6 Councillor Harold Kim, suggesting the proponents look at two L-shaped buildings instead of four: ?When I look at this application, it's clear you want to maximize the space. When I look at the number of buildings, it doesn't necessarily equate to maximizing space?. This is no higher than what has already been approved by Town Park at Berczy. We see York Region Transit buses travelling essentially empty [so] I am certainly happy those buses will be of use and the GO Train will be of use, so this is an appropriate location for high-density.?

By Brock Weir