

Questions raised around Council table on latest phase of Shining Hill development

There are questions that need to be answered on a large-scale residential development proposed for the north side of St. John's Sideroad West, Council has agreed.

The latest phase of the Shining Hill Development, which covers several parcels of land on St. John's, west of Yonge Street, was up for review by lawmakers at a Public Planning meeting on June 8.

Abutting Aurora's border with Newmarket and part of a plan that straddles both sides of the town line, up for discussion was the next phase of the development which includes a proposal for 88 single detached homes, an eight-storey apartment block of 233 units, a neighbourhood park block, private roads, natural heritage systems, and the redevelopment of property surrounding an already existing manor house which is slated to become the all-girls St. Anne's School in the near future.

There is a huge amount of natural heritage features that will be protected and, in some cases, enhanced, and all of that is intended to deal with the area in a way that makes it an unusual opportunity for Aurora and Newmarket, said consultant Don Given, speaking on behalf of the proponents. This will create an opportunity for a connected trail system up to Newmarket and connecting south to the balance of your trail systems. It will also allow for education areas along some of these trails because we will be having signage to help educate the public on the different features.

But environmental features became one of the reasons Council raised objections.

Their decision to send the plan back to the drawing board to address concerns raised around the table followed lengthy delegations from nearby residents who spoke out about potential environmental and traffic impacts that could result from what is proposed. They also questioned the number of single-family dwellings going into the space, an area that has generally been subject to lower density.

Councillors said they shared these concerns.

Go back and come up with a low-density solution, said Councillor Sandra Humfryes making a motion for a further report to come back to a future Public Planning meeting.

Among her primary concerns was the multi-storey building, which has already been reduced from a previously-proposed 10-storeys, and, along with Councillor Rachel Gilliland, she noted the more than 1,500 mature trees that will be lost to the development.

I have nothing against the design, it just doesn't belong there, she continued. I am in total agreement with the neighbours and residents. Please consider the trees. Do your best to preserve them. If you build a low-density area, there's a lot more opportunity to think outside the box and protect those trees.

But Mr. Given said with growth targets provided by the Province, a move away from low-density will be required in the future.

We're supposed to be avoiding sprawl, he said. We're supposed to be far more compact and all of that is part of provincial policy. We are pushing it to the lowest level we can with these larger lots that we've got here and try to balance it out with higher density to make that number reached. When it comes to mixing product types, we're being asked to have a varied approach to housing types as opposed to all the same. What the residents are asking for is more of the same. The policies we're creating in the future will be more inclusive, there will be a variety of housing types, a variety of densities, and they are all going to be done in a way that is an integration of different income levels and different people and that is where planning is going.

Councillor Wendy Gaertner, however, questioned this position.

The Provincial policies that talk about density are not talking about greenfield and intensification, she said. We just had the

consultants' report on that and we're looking at Yonge Street in and around transit.?

Also speaking in favour of a new report was Councillor John Gallo who apologized at the table for his decision related to Phase 2 of the development where it relates to trees being felled to accommodate sidewalks.

?I missed it and I apologise, but we're here now and you can't change the past [but] we can effect change with this application,? he said, praising members of the public for coming forward to share their concerns. ?I am grateful [they are] going to keep a close eye on us and that is what I always want when we do these types of things because it is on their behalf and I love hearing from them.?

Similarly, Councillor Harold Kim said he agreed ?by and large? with the views residents voiced.

?I am certainly surprised by the ten-storey and then eight-storey building because it certainly was not what I had thought when I opened the report last week. That I am not in agreement with,? he said. ?We still need to look at traffic studies and other items that were mentioned and I would be in favour of the amendment to bring it back to a future Public Planning meeting.?

Added Councillor Michael Thompson: ?I don't think an eight-storey building is compatible or suitable for the area and I would like to see that reduced. Going forward I think there needs to be some degree of collaboration or coordination with Newmarket because how that property develops just north does impact very much so on Aurora.

?Density is an issue. I would like to see how those lots compare to Brentwood and Willow Farm because we have always tried to have compatibility and suitability of developments. I would like to see some more information on that going forward? There is obviously still a bit of work to be done. I look forward to seeing some significant revisions as we go forward.?

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter