

Residential building, heritage relocation approved for Yonge and St. John's

Plans for a five-storey residential building for the southeast quadrant of Yonge Street and St. John's Sideroad moved forward at Council this week, despite several Old Yonge Street-area neighbours coming forward to object to the development.

Council last week approved Official Plan and Zoning Bylaw amendments for the properties located at 16003 Yonge Street, and 225 and 2019 Old Yonge Street.

The changes to the property include the relocation of the historic Red House, which was most recently home to the restaurant Oakland Hall, to a different location within the property envelope and its restoration back to its origins as a single-family residence.

The amendments redesignate and rezone the lands for medium-high density residential, detached residential, and environmental protection uses, said the Town of Aurora in a statement following last week's Council meeting. Council also approved a Heritage Permit for the relocation and alteration of the historic Red House, subject to a Conservation Management Plan and a future site plan and development agreement approvals. Implementing the bylaws will be considered at a future Council meeting.

Last week's Council meeting, the penultimate one on the schedule for the 2022-2026 term of Council, was a further opportunity for concerned residents to speak out and several did so once again, reiterating their worries about the size of the development, its impact on area traffic, particularly the already congested area of St. John's and Old Yonge, and what they say is an insufficient transition from the long-established Tara Hill residential community nearby.

The majority of Council, however, said proponents of the development have worked to address residents' concerns, a position underscored by Oz Kemal, President of MHBC Planning, who outlined the changes made to the original proposal in light of public feedback.

This process began in early 2024, during which we worked with the Conservation Authority over the course of the year to establish the proper developable limits of this site and protect the environmental features. From there, it was then that we prepared and submitted an application in April 2025, conducted public engagement throughout the fall, and made our final submission in the spring of this year, he said.

I note that the approval tonight is not the end of this process. There's still a whole site plan approval process where we get into the real nitty gritty details, where additional design refinements can occur. The proposed residential building will provide 148 residential units ranging from one- to three-bedroom apartments. Access to the apartment will be provided through an existing driveway along Yonge Street, and that will connect to two levels of underground parking.

While a municipal sidewalk is not currently on the west side of Old Yonge Street, a bone of contention for many residents, Kemal said there is a 4.5 metre buffer should the Town choose to provide a sidewalk in the future.

The sidewalk, along with the overall issue of pedestrian safety, remains an issue with the plan, and one which Marco Ramunno, Aurora's Director of Planning, says can be hashed out at the site plan application stage.

The next step would be for the applicant to submit a formal site application [which] will deal with some of the engineering and architectural details, said Ramunno. That's where we would impose a condition on that site plan for the construction of a sidewalk along the west side of Old Yonge, along the frontage of the subject lands, out to the existing sidewalk on St. John's. That would then provide that pathway for any residents on the west side of Old Yonge to go north to St. John's, and then west to the intersection at Yonge and St. John's, and cross to the west side of Yonge Street where there is a sidewalk and a trail system.

Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese said he was glad that the four-metre right of way for the sidewalk was incorporated into the plan, but said he still had concerns related to density, the transition from nearby single-family homes, and lack of affordable housing units in

the plan.

"We haven't had any of this being considered affordable, have we?" he said. "Has the developer come to you and said he wants to do even 10 per cent, not even 25 per cent being affordable? Has there been any chance to take some of these individuals and try to help make them affordable for using the 30 per cent gross income of an individual?"

Ramunno replied that discussion could also be a part of the site plan process and the application is aware of Aurora's requirements for "affordable" units.

"Just based on the rationale laid out in our staff report, we identify this type of built form as providing additional opportunities for varying housing types and smaller units," said Ramunno.

"I'll take that as a no," replied Councillor Weese, "because unless we have it in writing and we have it that they're interested in doing it, it's not going to be affordable according to our affordability index."

The issue of the sidewalk was also a concern for Ward 5 Councillor John Gallo, who sought assurances as to who would be footing the bill for its completion. Ramunno said a condition of approval would be the applicant covering the cost of construction.

"I think that this developer has done everything they can do to make this building as good as it can be to fit in with the neighbourhood," concluded Ward 3 Councillor Wendy Gaertner. "It's gone to unusual lengths, but there's a basic fact and the basic fact is this building is too large for this neighbourhood. There's no compatibility with the neighbourhood, there's no transition. It certainly doesn't fit the intent of the Regional Transit Corridor."

"Our current bylaw is based on greenfield development, and now we're moving into a new phase of more urban development. We always go by the bylaw that is in place, I have been asking for the bylaws to be changed?. This development does not conform to this bylaw, and it doesn't conform to the York Region Corridor Policy. It's just that simple."

"Then, if we add on to that all the comments from residents in the neighbourhood, I don't see how we could possibly approve this development. I thank the developer for really amazing work, it's just not the right property for that building."

The amendments were advanced 5 ? 1 with Councillor Gaertner voting against it and Mayor Tom Mrakas absent from the meeting.

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