

Triplex proposed for Heritage Conservation District takes step forward

A contentious proposal to build a new triplex in Aurora's Heritage Conservation District (HCD) took a step forward last week.

Council on January 25 approved a Heritage Permit Application to permit the construction of a two-storey building at 74 Centre Street.

The proposal has seen several changes since it was first filed and the revised plan that was on the table last week took into account a number of concerns voiced by area residents who have opposed the plan.

Issues raised by nearby residents included the depth of the lot, the number of windows, landscaping and other factors which, they say, were not in keeping with the Town's only HCD, located in the northeast quadrant of Yonge and Wellington.

Following comments received from the November 16, 2021, General Committee meeting, the applicant submitted a revised proposal on December 8 to permit the construction of a two-storey triplex dwelling with parking provided in a detached garage located in the rear yard, which will be accessed by a driveway located along the west side yard.

The proposal includes a landscape buffer with pyramidal cedars along the rear property line to help minimize the visual impact on the abutting property to the north. Extensive planting is proposed along the west property line and near the front of the east property line, while existing vegetation along the east property line will be preserved to further mitigate any potential impacts of the proposal to the abutting property to the east. The large mature tree in the front yard is to remain.

The proposed building continues the Homestead architectural style of a square-shaped building designed with a gable roof, said Planning staff in a report to Council. The proposal further maintains a single detached building form, which is the predominant style in the Northeast Old Aurora neighbourhood.

Town Staff and, in general, members of HAC have been supportive of the proposal, but Council had been at odds with their recommendation when faced with neighbourhood opposition.

One neighbour reiterated some concerns at last week's meeting through a video delegation to Council, particularly relating to the preservation of the large tree between their property and the property in question during construction. By the end of the meeting, however, local lawmakers were satisfied with the changes that had been made.

In approving the Heritage Application, however, Council underscored that this is not the end of the road in the planning process.

I want to thank the applicant for their willingness to continue to find a compromise instead of pulling the rug out from underneath and going straight to the (Ontario Land) Tribunal, said Mayor Tom Mrakas. That's what we always ask for. What we wanted is applications to come forward and we will be building what we envision through our plans.

There is still a lot to do, he added, with reference to site plan approval. We're going to end up with hopefully with a triplex that will provide more units for people to live in and hopefully be more affordable, and ultimately that is a good thing for our Town.

While the number of units has not changed in the last few iterations of the proposal, Councillor Wendy Gaertner, who had previously expressed her support for the recommendations coming from municipal staff and from HAC, reiterated her views.

The design is in keeping with the guidelines for the Old Aurora Heritage Conservation District, that is what we're looking at tonight, that is what we're considering, and that is what is in our staff report, she said.

Similarly, Councillor John Gallo kept his focus on the matter of the Heritage Permit and said despite concerns over the tree, he was

satisfied with the plans the property owner had to preserve it, and it was time to move forward.

‘Everything else they appear to comply with as far as the heritage permit,’ he said. ‘There’s still a lot more road to go in terms of dealing with the site plan and all kinds that need to be checked off. I am content to move forward with this and take it to the next level. We can go all night regarding parking, setbacks, height and all of that stuff that has no bearing tonight.’

But other Council members had lingering concerns.

Councillor Rachel Gilliland, for instance, said there were some ‘unanswered questions’ on the table related to the width of the driveway and on-site drainage she would like to see addressed.

‘I do feel they have met a lot of the heritage aspects, I completely get that, but I do think it is good as Council members if we do point out the things that are concerning,’ she said. ‘There are just some unanswered questions and I think that is really a concern where they feel they (the residents) aren’t being heard, but the actual heritage aspect has been worked with and that is great. I am glad we’re getting there.’

Added Councillor Sandra Humfries, a member of the HAC, ‘I know it seems like a long process to get here and a bit of a frustrating one, but we got here, I really believe, for the right reasons, and just to make sure we have the best build in a Heritage District that we can get. We have a long way to go. I think a lot of the concerns were addressed. Sometimes I believe Heritage would have liked to have seen a single-dwelling or a semi, but it’s a triplex and it is up to Zoning.’

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