

Up for sale, Canadian Tire proposes dividing old store into three units

By Brock Weir

From another big box store, to town houses, and even a condo, speculation has been rife over the future of the former Canadian Tire store in south Aurora since the retailer moved from Yonge Street to Bayview Avenue.

But, a proposal to turn the store into three smaller stores and pave the way for a drive-thru and other uses on the property raised eyebrows in nearby neighbourhoods and around the Council table.

Council has delayed a decision on a zoning amendment application for the property filed by Canadian Tire after area residents spoke out about potential noise, traffic and property maintenance, among other concerns. The property in question is now up for sale and that potential change of status was something of a game changer.

The deferral, which carried 5 ? 4, will allow Council more time to get answers on these remaining concerns of local homeowners, they argued.

?I think it would be unwise to give any zoning changes before we know what the new owner is going to do with the property,? said Councillor Wendy Gaertner, responding to comments from Councillor Michael Thompson that it might be a good idea for the purchasers of the property to come before Council with the same application.

Citing residents' worries over noise and light pollution, she added: ?At the end of the day, we have to keep in mind we have residents backing onto the property. It really is a quality of life issue for these residents.?

Tuesday's Council meeting delivered elected officials ?a significant amount of information? for the first time that needed to be digested before making a decision, argued Councillor Thompson.

Also in favour of a deferral until the end of June was Mayor Geoff Dawe who said it was his ?understanding that Canadian Tire is essentially testing the water.?

Others, however, said the application was merely a change in commercial zoning already in place. Councillor Paul Pirri, for instance, said it would be a different story if whoever purchases the Canadian Tire land, which was formally under the ownership of Sterling Drugs, came forward with a plan for condominiums or townhouses.

?We're not talking about allowing for things that are outrageous,? said Councillor Pirri. ?A lot of the same issues that have existed in the past will continue to exist: issues around garbage collection that existed when it was a Canadian Tire. That is not a new issue that is arising from these changes. What would be the ramifications of turning this down, as we have all sat around the table to say we are turning it down because the property owner is looking to sell, and we're not looking at the planning merits of this change? We're looking at the circumstances around the application, but we're not actually looking at the application itself.

?I think we will have more of a discussion [if] someone buys this property and puts in more of a townhome complex or condos that are abutting Yonge Street. Definitely there is more work to be done and conversations to be had, but that is not what this is talking about.?

Councillor Sandra Humfryes said she agreed and Council should have made a decision on February 14. Aurora is growing, she said, and it is important to ?think out of the box? in terms of how to address growth. Councillor John Abel also offered a similar perspective.

?I think the information is right here,? he said. ?I really think our role is to try and promote business, try and encourage business, try and attract development. We're really trying to take a place that is currently empty at the south end of Town and attract some commercial investment?allowing it to be divided into three big shops, which is what we see with Winners and other places. We had a good discussion, we did walk with the neighbours and those things have been addressed.

?I think [deferral] sends the wrong message. We shouldn't be involved in what a property owner has to do except for the zoning and away they go. We're trying to encourage that. We get assessment and away we go. Should we feel uneasy because someone is putting a property up for sale? I don't think so. I think that is business. The concerns that were brought forward, the director said would be addressed with any site plan application because it is on record and those are our concerns.?