

Yonge and Wellington development raises traffic worries



By Brock Weir

It's almost complete, and when it is, a new stacked townhouse development near the northwest corner of Yonge and Wellington will bring 126 new homes to Aurora's downtown core.

While the development will bring new people into the area, just how they are going to get in and out, has raised concerns around the Council table.

Council last week, sitting at the committee level, sounded alarm bells over the Treasure Hill development, 126 stacked back-to-back townhouse units built on the site of the grocery store which once stood at Aurora's busiest intersection.

Council approved an official plan amendment in June of 2016, converting this site into a residential designation, and thus paving the way for the townhouse development, including visitor parking and private roads on the site.

But these private roads only go so far.

The development foregoes access onto Yonge Street, which is seen as a positive for drivers travelling north and south, but the only way one can access the new development is off Machell Avenue, which connects at Wellington Street West.

There is only one way in, there is only one way out, and this could be a problem, according to some Council members.

"I am kind of speechless," said Councillor Wendy Gaertner, asking Marco Ramunno, Aurora's Director of Planning, if Central York Fire Services had approved a plan with no secondary access for fire and emergency vehicles.

"The site plan was approved about a year ago and construction is near completion," replied Mr. Ramunno. "It met the fire route requirements and all the other site plan design criteria."

Some Councillors nevertheless remained sceptical, with suggestions the Town undertake a traffic study of its own, above and beyond the one provided, as required, by the developers themselves.

"Once this site is up and running, will staff be conducting any type of traffic study of our own, considering it is only a one-way in and out from Machell and then, from there, entering onto Wellington?" asked Councillor Tom Mrakas. "Right now it is a difficult turn to manoeuvre."

Occupancy, said Mr. Ramunno, is expected this fall and Aurora typically doesn't undertake a traffic study of its own. That being said, he added they could have their in-house traffic analyst go out and monitor the site once it is fully occupied. Proper traffic transportation studies were already conducted, he concluded.

"While I appreciate that, the applicant did do a traffic study and I think we have seen this many times that I don't think we have seen an applicant come forward with a traffic study that says there is too much traffic and it won't be able to handle it," Councillor Mrakas continued. "I would prefer us to do our own traffic study and maybe we can speak to the Region as well and have them look at doing a traffic study and some counts along Wellington coming out of Machell. I believe there are going to be some issues with traffic once that is up and running."

Councillors Gaertner and Mrakas weren't the only ones with these concerns.

Councillor Sandra Humfries, for instance, said while she likes the development as it is progressing just north of the intersection, she said she hoped it wouldn't cause a traffic concern.

?I think the goal is the people in the area who live there hopefully use transit and walk because everything is there,? she said.
?Hopefully transit is a great option for them and I am thankful that we're coming to the end of this development and happy to move forward with this.?

Nevertheless, none of this allayed Councillor Gaertner's concerns.

?To me, having a fairly dense development at Yonge and Wellington in our downtown core that doesn't have a secondary emergency exit, even if it isn't an exit that is in use [in case] fire, etc., need to use it, I find it very strange and in 14 years I have never seen any plan that we have ever approved that had only one entrance and exit to be used in case of an emergency.?

There is pedestrian access out to Yonge Street, Mr. Ramunno remarked and while traffic will have this singular access point, it has been vetted through both the municipality's engineering and planning department, as well as with Central York Fire Services.

?If Fire is happy with that, I am pleased to hear it,? she said.