

Density at issue as Council takes on Timberlane redevelopment

By Brock Weir

Residents in the neighbourhood of Timberlane Athletic Club filled Town Hall last week as Council took the first crack at a plan to turn the tennis facility into a housing development.

Councillors, however, expressed concern that higher-than-usual proposed density might set a negative precedent in other areas in the south end of Aurora.

On the table were proposed amendments to Aurora's Official Plan and zoning bylaw to pave the way for a 68-unit condominium development comprised of single detached, semi-detached, and townhouses over the 11.8 club property.

In a report before Council from Marco Ramunno, Aurora's Director of Planning, the Official Plan allows for a range of development patterns compatible with low density uses of the existing neighbourhoods. While Provincial legislation encourages higher densities in new developments, neighbours came forward to say what is proposed for the site was incompatible with nearby uses.

"This is of great concern to us and we would like to see changes," said John Greenhough to Council. "We look to you as good shepherds for our interest and for your support. All are very concerned with the density issue. We are not against infill projects. We know they are important. We are reasonable people, we know things change, but with 11 acres of land that is available we do not agree with the proposed density for the 68 units. By comparison, Falconwood Estates is just 30 units on 8.5 acres of land."

He also spoke on the impacts the development will have on the aesthetics of the neighbourhood, while Aurora resident Judy Gilchrist spoke up for interests on protecting the Oak Ridges Moraine land. In reviewing the project, Councillors need to keep in mind the "cumulative impacts" of losing permeability for groundwater in the area, she said, noting the provincial movement "De-pave Paradise."

Residents from other neighbourhoods had concerns as well, particularly in the areas of Vandorf Sideroad and Industrial Parkway.

"It will result in a density-built community that will not only be an eyesore in comparison to the surrounding communities, but will also create a traffic nightmare due to increased density proposed," said Charlotte May, a resident of Wycliffe Gardens. "There is often a wait of up to five minutes to exit our community during peak hours. The additional traffic that would be generated by this new community will further add to this burden."

While these concerns were noted and addressed by consultants for the developers on hand for the session, Council voted to bring the plan back to Public Planning for further consultation and review.

"Intensification is obviously something we're going through and need to adjust, but going from what we have in the surrounding areas just seems a bit high for me," said Councillor Sandra Humfries. "I would like to see some future discussion to somehow allow this area to look more like the surrounding areas."

Councillor Tom Mrakas agreed.

"I feel the density is pretty high, and a little too high for my liking. I think it sets a dangerous precedent."

Councillor Michael Thompson, on the other hand, said it was important to acknowledge the work Brookfield, the developer, has done to that point on the second version of the plan. There is a "willingness", he said, on all parties to work together to come up with a "reasonable solution", yet he shared concerns over the density.

"The question is, is this suitable or compatible or reasonable for the neighbourhood in this area is very much a concern with me, and similar to what I have heard from residents," he said. "I would also like to see further discussions around density and bringing it

more in line with everything else because I also share the concerns about setting that precedent and what does that mean for the future??