

Highland Gate neighbours have many questions ahead of redevelopment open house

By Brock Weir

No man is an island, as the old saying goes, and that might be a sentiment shared by residents living around the now-defunct Highland Gate Golf Course.

On Wednesday, April 15, an open house for the community will be hosted by ClubLink, the owners of the former golf course, and development partner Geranium Homes, to discuss plans for the residential land redevelopment which were filed at Town Hall on February 28.

From the perspective of the Highland Gate Ratepayers, a group formed this past winter by neighbours to provide a united voice on the redevelopment plans, it will be the first opportunity to have substantial talks with the redevelopers to voice their concerns, but Dave Newton, President of the ratepayers group questions whether this meeting will achieve everyone's objectives.

‘They presented the plan and we have been digesting it, reviewing it and the open house will really be the first opportunity [to communicate with them],’ says Mr. Newton. ‘This is the official draft and I am sure there is some room for back and forth, but we just want to see that it represents the best interests of the existing community while, at the same time, recognizing that they are private landowners and they have the right to develop. We just want to make sure that whatever they ultimately develop lends itself to what is already there.’

There is already doubt on that front, he says. Geranium and ClubLink filed their draft plans for the redevelopment with Town Planners which include 184 lots, a high density block closer to Yonge Street, and land set aside for trails and greenspace. The plan, however, received mixed-to-negative reviews from area residents, objecting to a number of key facets of the plan, including the multitude of cul-de-sacs and the general layout of planned streets.

‘The fact is a lot of folks are basically living on an island of grass whereby they have the front of their house facing asphalt and the back of their house facing asphalt and that wasn't exactly embraced,’ says Mr. Newton. ‘There are backyards facing onto the sides of houses. It seems like they could have spent a little more time – if not a lot more time – coming up with something that blended within the fabric of the existing community, which is really what Geranium presented from the outset, but it doesn't.’

‘Everybody recognizes that ClubLink has the right to develop, if that is what they choose; however, they feel this particular plan mitigates a lot of the concerns that existing homeowners have, including traffic flow, congestion and stuff like that. If they were looking for density, they could get it elsewhere and there are other ways to do it without impacting directly on a lot of the homeowners right now.’

The April 15 meeting will be held in the cafeteria of Dr. G.W. Williams Secondary School at 39 Dunning Avenue. Originally slated to be held at the Highland Gate Club House, there were concerns that that particular venue would not be able to hold all the residents eager to come and speak about the proposals and, in the words of Mr. Newton, ‘get the answers they might be looking for in order to have a piece of mind.’

‘[Residents] want to know how new houses are going to impact the environment, how the greenspace is going to be monitored, managed and maintained in order to get the density they are asking for. Is there a way you could develop limitedly, much like this would be considered limitedly, and still perhaps maintain a nine-hole golf course? The questions and concerns just run the gamut and they are limitless.’