

# OMB paves way for Highland Gate redevelopment

**By Brock Weir**

A plan to transform the former Highland Gate Golf Course into a 159 unit residential development with a seven story condominium building represents "good planning," ruled the Ontario Municipal Board last Thursday.

The Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) formally approved the contentious proposal offered by property owners Highland Gate Redevelopments Inc., at a multi-hour hearing held in Council chambers on December 1.

Since it was first proposed last year, the redevelopment plan had been whittled down in size and scope through mediation between the developers, the Town and local ratepayers down from an original offer of 184 residential units and a 10 storey condo.

As The Auroran reported last month, the settlement, which was reached by all parties on November 17, includes not only the scaled down builds, but an expansive park on the west side of the and an extensive trails system.

This collaborative process between stakeholders was hailed by OMB member Ian Rowe as he offered his oral decision to the public at the end of the meeting.

"The board heard that this matter today is the result of a mediated settlement between all of the parties and the series of settlements have achieved a resolution acceptable to all the various interests and concerns of the parties to this proceeding," said Mr. Rowe.

"There have been substantial amendments to the proposal as originally submitted and these amendments have addressed the concerns and created a proposal that the developer can live with and the community generally has accepted and approves of.

"I would suggest that the settlement has been sensitive to the interface with existing development with the proposal and, on a broader scale, will create a trail system which will be of benefit not just to the residents of the development itself, but also to a much broader community. The developer is to be complemented with respect to the compromises it has made and the ongoing consultative process envisaged in the various minutes of settlement.

"The minutes of settlement have achieved a number of goals that have satisfied a number of interests and the parties have done well to achieve this."

In making his decision, Mr. Rowe highlighted evidence received at the hearing from land planners which bolstered his decision that the development, as it stands now, satisfies the interest of the Province of Ontario as set out in the Planning Act, as well as Official Plan details at the Regional and Municipal levels, and intensification outlined by the Province to the lower two tiers of government. Of particular interest, he said, was addressing the loss of green space that will result from the development of the golf course, which has been informally used by the public over the nearly 80 years Highland Gate was in use as a golf course.

The owners of the golf course could have restricted public access to their lands at any point over the decades, Mr. Rowe contended, so the results of the settlement, which will transfer land to the Town of Aurora for parkland use is "a vast improvement in terms of guaranteeing access to a great deal of green space," including the trail links.

"I believe the net result of the approval will guarantee access to significant green space to which the public would have been at risk if the matter had not proceeded on this basis," said Mr. Rowe. "No doubt this process has been costly, lengthy and litigious.

However, the Board knows it has achieved a result that has found consensus with all the various parties in what has obviously [been] a very contentious matter at its commencement. The Board is pleased that the mediation process the Board undertook has contributed to that settlement.

"The Board is satisfied that the proposal, as amended, represents good planning and congratulates the parties on being able to resolve this matter to avoid an even lengthier, more costly litigious process."

Mr. Rowe's decision was greeted with enthusiasm by Cheryl Shindruk of Highland Gate Developments, Inc. Speaking to The Auroran moments after his decision was rendered, she said she was "very pleased" with the outcome.

"We have worked very hard with all the parties in this process to find a solution and find a version of the plan that addressed as many of the issues as possible," said Ms. Shindruk. "There are many satisfied residents today as a result of that process. From that point of view, we look forward to continuing on the dialogue with the community as we go forward with this plan."