

Residents speak out against Highland Gate development



By Angela Gismondi

Aurora residents still have a lot of concerns when it comes to the proposed Highland Gate residential development.

A special Council Public Planning meeting, the first of three, was held last Wednesday at St. Maximilian Kolbe Catholic High School. Hundreds of residents packed the school cafeteria and over 35 neighbours came forward to urge Council's opposition to the development.

The proposal is to build new homes on the former Highland Gate Golf Club. The site has about 101 acres of land and is surrounded by existing single detached homes, a seniors' residence and two apartment buildings.

The developer, Geranium Corporation, in partnership with Clublink, is proposing to add a new high-density residential block consisting of 184 single detached dwellings, a 100-unit condo building, parkettes, open space/vistas, trails and environmental protection. In order to allow for the plan of subdivision, the developer has submitted Official Plan Amendment and zoning bylaw amendment applications to the Town.

The meeting was held as a result of the large number of residents who attended the community open house meeting this past April. Planning Staff recommended to Council two additional public planning meetings be held beyond the statutory Planning Act requirement and that the meetings be held outside of the Council Chamber in order to accommodate the anticipated large volume of residents.

Additional meetings will be held on the matter in September and October.

Residents expressed many of the same concerns they did at the open house. The primary concern was the proposed density and streets running through the backyards of the existing homes and how increased traffic would affect their quality of life, property values and their ability to enjoy their property.

They were also concerned about open space, the preservation of trees and vegetation, watercourses and watersheds and natural heritage, compatibility and urban design, engineering matters specifically dealing with water capacity and drainage and the possibility of damage to existing homes as a result of construction.

‘We did do an analysis of the density,’ said Don Given of Malone Given Parsons, representing the applicant at the meeting. ‘Our density is in keeping with the density in this neighbourhood. It’s not out of character.’

He said the traffic will not be a ‘significant imposition’ as it is expected to increase by 15 cars a day. He added the Town will get

approximately 40 acres of the entire site in greenspace ? a portion in the form of parkland and a portion gratis, with no cost to the municipality.

Dave Newton, president of the Highland Gate Rate Payers Association, was the first deputant to come forward at the meeting. The mission of the group, which is made up of 560 community-minded individuals, is to ensure any development that takes place within the Highland Gate community is compatible with the existing neighbourhood. He said the Town has strong planning tools which allow them to turn down applications that do not follow proper planning principles.

?The majority of our members are opposed to this developer's plans to run roads down every fairway, obliterating the green space and creating huge increases to traffic in the neighbourhood,? said Newton, who received a standing ovation following his comments. ?Building roads directly behind the backyards of a finished, established neighbourhood is not only unreasonable, but not good planning. This development brings no benefit to the homeowners that have lived in this community and paid taxes here for decades. Why not try to create a legacy for all Aurora residents to enjoy for generations to come??

Bob Callow urged Council to consider their vision for the lands and how the development would look 20 or 30 years down the road.

?Having a green space this large in the community, this is an opportunity, a responsibility you have to take advantage of,? said Callow.

Many of the residents echoed the sentiment, asking council to consider preserving the green space or turn it into parkland and create a New York City-type Central Park in Aurora instead of approving the development.

Bruce Corbett, a member of the Oak Ridges Trail Association in Aurora, said he wanted to make a case for creating a continuous, off-road, multi-purpose trail from Bathurst Street to Yonge Street.

?The trail would be a real asset to south Aurora residents and would preserve a unique ribbon of lovely space,? he noted. ?We are very close to making this long term dream a reality.?

Lorraine Coens asked that Council preserve Aurora's section of the Oak Ridges Moraine.

?When you walk the golf course property, it is idyllic,? she said, adding the property may be too small for a golf course but it is not big enough for a development. ?You can indulge in the beauty of the mature trees and hear the stream gurgling. We have a paradise right here in Aurora. This is New York City, just on a smaller scale.?

Graham Batchelor had a simple question for council and staff.

?My question is why ? why are we bothering with this, why is this development being proposed and why is council considering it,? asked Batchelor. ?Why do we sacrifice a park, greenspace that everybody loves for unneeded urban development??

Jean Fraser said it is important for residents to ban together to make sure the project does not move forward. Even if the developer appeals to the Ontario Municipal Board, she believes the Town has a strong case.

?We have the resources, we have the will, we have the way and we have so much expertise in this room,? she said. ?We can do it.?

No decisions were made at the meeting. The comments were received and referred back to staff, who will continue to review the applications.

?Our staff has not finished analyzing all the reports,? said Mayor Geoffrey Dawe to the crowd at the end of the meeting, adding a peer review is also underway. ?They will be analyzed over the summer. Planning staff will take the points raised tonight and answer as many questions as they can. We will be taking all of your comments and concerns into consideration as we move forward in this

process.

The next public planning meeting will be held September 30 at St. Max.