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King Council opposes Mary Lake subdivision

By Angela Gismondi

King council cannot support the Mary Lake Estates subdivision plan in its current form.

That was the decision made this past Monday night at a special council meeting held at the King City Arena. Four of the six councillors in attendance at the meeting opposed the recommendations in the staff report to approve the plan of subdivision. They asked instead that staff continue to work with the developer and the community to see if some of the outstanding issues can be resolved. If that fails, the motion directs staff to retain legal counsel and planners to represent the Township at the Ontario Municipal Board hearing (OMB).

The applicant, Victor Culotta, is proposing to develop 96 single detached homes on 61.5 acres of land located west of Keele Street on the south side of the 15th Sideroad. The applications have already been appealed by Mary Lake Estates to the OMB. Pre-hearing conferences have been held and the hearing is slated to begin on April 15.

The arena was packed with local residents who do not want to see the high density development built in the rural area of Keele Street and the 15th Sideroad in King City. Brian Pritchard made a deputation to council on behalf of 168 homes who make up the Kingscross Estates Ratepayers Association (KERA). Pritchard pointed out there have been a number of meetings on the matter and there is no point in rehashing all the issues that have been brought up.

?I think everybody who is here tonight and who has been around this understands the issues already and I see no point in dragging this out,? said Pritchard. ?As custodians of our community we look to our community leaders to shape what our community looks like and how our community develops and is shaped over the coming years. Tonight we are asking you, our respected community leaders, to side with the residents.?

He asked that council oppose the subdivision plan.

?We are asking King Township councillors to vote ?no' to the current plan for Mary Lake Estates subdivision,? said Pritchard, adding he understands going to the OMB will require retaining lawyers and planners that support the decision. ?Some say the challenge at the OMB will be a significant fight not easily won.?

Some of the issues cited by residents in the past is that the proposed subdivision does not fit in with the rural character of the community, it could set a precedent, that there are too many houses on lots that are far too small and are not in conformity with the King City Community Plan and that there is not an adequate transition from the existing subdivision to the new proposed one.

?We are given the job of balancing the objective of maintaining our community character with the provincial policies to increase densities in residential areas,? said Mayor Steve Pellegrini. ?I believe this council should show its leadership by defining not only what the balance should be, but also how we go about the process of managing community change.?

He explained that at last week's meeting, council approved a subdivision at Keele Street and McClure Drive in King City where residents and the developer worked together to strike a balance and came up with a development that was reasonably acceptable to all parties.

?The application before us tonight is for the most northerly edge of King City, immediately adjacent to the Moraine and Greenbelt. To the south is Kingscross Estates, Ontario's first estate residential community, with some of the most valuable homes in York Region,? said Pellegrini. ?The application before us, in my opinion, does not address this important geography and community context. I recognize that with the provision of full services that densities must increase, but I believe more work needs to be done to find a compatible design and neighborhood character.

?As proposed there will be a stark and inappropriate division, as the existing homes, well setback from their rear fences will conflict with the new homes which are proposed to have setbacks of less than half the requirement of the lots to the north,? Pellegrini stated. ?I think we should ensure that we are fostering good neighbors as well as creating good neighborhoods. In my opinion there is significant room for improvement in this transition area, and until the conflicts and design incompatibility is addressed I cannot vote for approval. From my discussions with the parties I believe that with some time a solution, a compromise, can be found.?

Not all councillors felt the same way.

?I do not understand why there is so much opposition to this,? said Councillor Peter Grandilli. ?I think we should vote with the staff proposal ? I don't see anything wrong with it.?

Councillor Debbie Schaefer was particularly concerned about the proposed transition between the two subdivisions.

?The transitions are still not where they need to be,? said Schaefer adding the new lots should reflect the neighbouring new ones. ?I believe there is an opportunity to do this if there is a will. My constituents that live adjacent to this development, they don't see that there is harmony,? said Schaefer. ?Right now there is a clash and it doesn't work for me.?

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Grandilli made a motion to accept the staff recommendations to approve the plan of subdivision. Grandilli and Cober voted in favour of the staff recommendations while councillors Mortelliti, Eek, Schaefer and Mayor Pellegrini voted against it.
Schaefer then put forward an alternate motion in order to give staff some direction on how to proceed. In her motion, Schaefer asked that staff be directed to work together with local residents and the applicant to resolve some of the outstanding issues, in particular with respect to the transition between the existing and proposed new subdivision. Should the discussions fail, the motion instructs staff to retain legal counsel and planners at the OMB. Schaefer's motion passed.