

Amendment bid raises questions about land's future

By Mark Pavilons

The possibility of some excess Magna lands being used for warehouses has created quite a stir among King residents.

Magna International has applied for a zoning bylaw amendment to permit warehousing on a large swath of land it owns at the corner of King Road and Jane Street. Recently, Magna deemed the majority of these lands as surplus, save a portion in the northwest corner, reserved for its future headquarters. Magna has plans to sell off these surplus lands.

Up for sale are 82.36 acres of employment lands and Magna will retain 20.76 acres for their future head office.

The application deals with an L-shaped swath currently zoned as E1-9 and Magna is hoping it can be designated to permit warehousing. The 104-acre property contains four different zones, but all relate to employment lands.

The Official Plan designates the lands as prestige employment and this includes accessory and ancillary commercial and retail uses. Light industrial uses are permitted and planning staff believe warehousing is considered a light industrial use, as outlined in the King City Community Plan. There's no clear definition of warehousing in the plan and the KCCP does not allow commercial, self-storage warehousing.

Staff are reviewing this aspect of the land use to get a handle on the implications of including warehousing as a permitted use.

Councillor Debbie Schaefer said she doesn't want to see a large distribution centre on the land.

Steve Albanese, of IBI Group, planning agent on behalf of Magna, said the company has no concrete plans or timelines for its future headquarters. He sees the application as bringing the lands into conformity with the KCCP, and that's it. They're continuing to work with Township staff.

Residents are worried that this rezoning will set a precedent that will result in some large-scale warehousing, and all the impacts that brings.

Planner Gaspare Ritacca stressed at this point the entire parcel is one piece, and no applications to divide it have been received. He said Magna needs permission for any severing of the lands and that will require approval by the Township.

At this point, it's a bid to change the use on one part of the property.

A resident of James Stokes Court said he moved here with his family because of the fact that King is an idyllic countryside community of communities. Warehousing is not only detrimental but goes against the rural nature of the municipality. He's worried about the traffic and congestion that will follow and he hopes ongoing dialogue will help.

Councillor Cleve Mortelliti said these lands have been earmarked for employment for more than 17 years and that carries an array of potential development.

Resident Judith Tenebaum pointed out the KCCP includes special guidelines for the gateway to King City and any development should be reflective of the nature of the community.

There's no place for warehousing in this location, she said, noting directly across King Road is an estate residential development, along with the King Heritage and Cultural Centre. There's nothing prestigious about warehousing, she observed, adding such facilities should be near rail transit corridors.

Tenebaum pointed out that Vaughan doesn't permit warehousing on any of its employment lands.

She can't see Magna requiring such warehousing, and believes this is being done in order to facilitate the sale of the lands.

Greg Locke, of Concerned Citizens of King Township, echoed these sentiments.

CCKT advocated strongly for the prestige employment land designation, before Magna purchased this site. Previously, the owner made an application to develop the property which included significant amounts of allowable retail and commercial uses, including warehousing, which was not in keeping with this vision.

While Magna was a welcomed partner in the community, this does not mean that as a community that we have lowered our expectations. A warehousing functionality, including the ingress and egress of transport trucks and noise, is not the quality, value-added use we are seeking.

Locke added it is not in keeping with the established surrounding residential areas: those immediately south of the lands and across King Road; the soon to be constructed King Township municipal offices to the east; the King Cultural Centre; Kingsbridge Centre, etc.

On its face, this looks like Magna trying to add marketing potential to the property by adding a common use typified by businesses

seeking to locate close to a major highway and interchange. We could see a business requiring a minimal amount of storage and shipping/receiving functionality that would be engaged in the kinds of prestige' uses we have been hoping to attract to these lands. But once it's zoned, how do we control it? The proximity to the Highway 400 interchange is just too magnetic for us to trust any assurance of this by a developer.

We are certainly in support of positive, sustainable economic development and the associated business tax revenue (we are quite supportive of our Sustainability Plan). But we need to be careful we get the quality we're seeking, especially in this unique case. The CCKT rejects staff's suggestion that warehousing fits in with zoned uses or even light industrial.

Let's be careful what we give away," Locke said.

Resident Bruce Craig said there was extensive public input into the KCCP, particularly regarding the prestige industrial designation.

It's important we get this right," he said.

Don't water down the prestige industrial use," said resident Susan Beharriell.

Albanese said warehousing should be an auxiliary use, to complement employment. He doesn't believe this is intended for large-scale warehousing.

Planning staff want more time to review the application and the matter will be referred back to council at a later date.