

Drive-through proposal supported with adjustments; public totally opposed

By Mark Pavilons

Despite vocal public opposition, and even some dissent from councillors, King council voted 4-3 to allow changes to a King City parcel that will permit a Starbucks with a drive-through component.

After hearing from a crowd of opponents, Mayor Steve Pellegrini asked for some changes to staff recommendations regarding the physical layout of the plan, before supporting it.

The applicant, Springgreen Holdings Ltd., asked to amend the property's zoning to commercial and mixed use. The lot was left over from the King Dufferin subdivision and at one point was considered for townhouses, but this was deemed inappropriate on these lands. The vacant lot is located on the southwest corner of King Road and Spring Hill Drive, with roughly 40 metres of frontage on King, and 80 metres along Spring Hill.

The plan is for a coffee shop and restaurant with a drive-through, patio, garbage enclosure, loading space and 37 parking spots. There's a proposed right-in and right-out on King Road.

Planners believe the property will act as an extension of the eastern anchor of the core area and fits in with the commercial mall across the road. Staff pointed out the property is surrounded by a wide diversity of land uses.

King and York staff are satisfied with the landscape plan submitted for the project and a portion of the existing sidewalk along King Road and Spring Hill Drive will be replaced.

A consultant compared data for drive-throughs and noted Starbucks drive-through are used less frequently than Tim Hortons, largely because Starbucks customers tend to go into the shop and sit. Consultants did admit that there is the potential for drive-through vehicles in line to spill over onto Spring Hill, which may impede traffic entering or existing the site.

Local residents spoke out against the plan, citing traffic and safety issues in this area.

Judith Tenenbaum said this plan puts the community at risk, stressing it's not prudent to approve such amendments before the Township's new Official Plan is complete. She suggested all zoning changes be put on hold until we have our new OP.

Designating this property as commercial is an example of 'spot zoning,' which, she said, benefits only the property owner, at the expense of the community.

This plan would lead to traffic and safety issues for residents and children in the area, many of whom walk or bike to school. Idling cars in the drive-through present obvious environmental hazards. Tenenbaum called drive-throughs 'throwbacks,' noting several municipalities have banned them altogether.

The congestion, she argued, will impact all nearby roads, including Lavender Valley Road, Warren Road, Patricia and Burton Grove.

The subdivision is also home to Holy Name School, and buses travel the roads at morning and afternoon peak periods.

'The Spring Hill area is a hidden gem, with numerous residences backing onto the wetlands or ravine. There is a clear line in the sand between the residential and commercial area. That line should not be transgressed,' she said.

Another resident said the peak periods for drive-throughs (7-9 a.m.) coincides with busy hours for school buses.

Another man pointed out a coffee shop will lead to increased litter in the area, compounding the existing problem.

A seven-year resident said she's also concerned about children's safety, noting she's enjoyed the small, green space in this area. She stressed that even the smallest of green parcels are important.

Kelly Colasanti noted he served as a crossing guard and he knows local traffic woes first-hand. 'This will make things worse,' he said. 'Congestion is already evident.'

A new resident to King City said he travels through town every day and said the traffic is already challenging.

Bruce Craig, representing Concerned Citizens of King Township, said they support building healthy communities. While CCKT is in favour of commercial growth, it needs to be balanced and in keeping with King's Sustainability Plan.

He questions whether drive-throughs have any benefits at all and he doesn't think this project is in keeping with King's vision.

The lot is bounded by wetlands on both sides and Craig said the new OP 'limits drive-throughs.'

'It's time to turn the page in our society on drive-throughs,' he said, adding villages should be designed to be more walkable.

Harvey Tenenbaum reminded councillors about the vigorous opposition campaign launched by residents. Councillors, he said,

should be guided by input from residents and not solely by planning staff.

"Residents have, and continue to make it abundantly clear, that they are unalterably opposed to this proposal," he said. Tenenbaum noted the best interests of the community take priority. Even LPAT appeals take into account municipal planning rules.

Other issues with this proposal include noise, annoying lights and more than 100 environmental issues alone.

Another resident said they purchased their home to enjoy the green spaces in King City. There's already a speeding problem on Lavender Valley and Warren and she has difficulty getting out of her own driveway. She wondered what would happen to children's safety if the drive-through becomes a reality. Further, a Starbucks would be "an eyesore."

A Spring Hill Drive resident commented that she, too, has trouble getting out of her driveway due to the traffic. She said they moved from Maple to get away from the congestion.

Susan Beharriell said this won't improve the neighbourhood, adding idling cars not only impact climate change through emissions, but waste tremendous amounts of fuel.

Councillor Debbie Schaefer sided with the residents, noting this project seems inconsistent in the big picture. She doesn't see it as a commercial extension of the core at all and it's also incompatible with the draft Official Plan.

Mayor Pellegrini pointed out to the crowd that councillors don't direct staff, but rather these professionals offer their educated advice. He cited two recent LPAT hearings where council sided with residents but went against staff recommendations. The tribunal decided against the Township in both instances. These hearings cost the Township a lot of money, staff time and resources fighting what's often a losing battle.

This application, he said, has been improved since it was first presented. He made the recommendations of shifting the drive-through window to help improve traffic flow on the site.

Councillor Bill Cober also came out in favour of the plan, noting some 32,000 cars travel along King Road each day. The market demand drives commercial investment like this, he pointed out. Today, time is precious and people demand the convenience of drive-throughs. Cars are becoming cleaner, and more electric vehicles will lower emissions and pollution in the future.

King has to shore up its residential to commercial ratio, to improve the overall tax burden. A commercial investment like this makes people stop in the village, and creates jobs.

Councillor Avia Eek sided with the residents, noting this project is not suitable on this parcel. She said residents' concerns really need to be taken into consideration. "These people live there; it's their community," she said.

Councillor Jordan Cescolini noted he supports business, but has listened to residents and stands up for them. He, too, opposed the recommendations.