

Local farm submits greenhouse bid to Township

By Mark PavilonisEditor

Township staff are working with a local farm in its application for expanded facilities, including a greenhouse. A public planning meeting was held recently for the bid by Kinghaven Farms for a greenhouse and other related uses on his horse farm on King Road. The farm owners want to convert the existing horse training facility and build a large greenhouse, measuring some 44,700 square feet, in three phases. The greenhouse operation will include new smart farm technology, including a hydroponic operation using automated machinery. A site plan still has to be submitted for the project. The property is located in the Greenbelt Greenbelt Protected Countryside Area. The purpose of the Protected Countryside Area is to enhance the overall quality of life in urban and rural areas by promoting agricultural viability and protection. An objective of this Area is to provide appropriate flexibility to allow for agricultural, agriculture-related and on-farm diversified uses, normal farm practices and an evolving agricultural and rural economy. The application(s) are currently undergoing a detailed technical review and have been circulated to internal departments and external agencies for review and comment. Staff will continue to work with the applicant to address feedback received through the public consultation process as well as comments raised through the technical review of the applications by internal departments and external agencies. Based on these comments revisions may be required to plans or reports submitted in support of these applications. A staff report to the Committee of the Whole will be brought forward at a later date for the Township to make a decision on the zoning bylaw amendment. The Kinghaven Farm has been a family business since 1967. It started as a thoroughbred breeding and racing farm with various barns, equipment/maintenance buildings, paddock, horse training track, and recently the farm is focussed on sustainable agribusiness in the field of apiculture, small batch goods, and woodland management. The site has dramatic rolling topography with natural heritage features (e.g., significant woodland, valleyland, wetland). The proposed location of the greenhouse facility will be outside of the regulated areas. The site is approximately 71.72 hectares (177.22 acres) in size with frontage on King Road and main access to the farm, and frontage on 7th Concession Road, an alternative access leading to the horse farm and proposed commercial greenhouse location. Pre-consultation was held in July 2022 with the Township of King, Toronto Region Conservation Authority (TRCA), and York Region. The Township's new Countryside Zoning Bylaw does not permit the proposed commercial greenhouse facility and requires the amendment for such an agricultural use. Parking requirements for a large scale greenhouse facility would require a significant amount of parking spaces (± 800 spaces) which would remove valuable land from the agricultural use and requires the amendment for the reduction in parking. The plan is for a new smart farm agricultural glass greenhouse that will produce leafy green lettuce with a hydroponic operation using automated machinery. The proposed facility will promote a diverse innovative economically strong and sustainable agricultural industry that strives to contribute to the Township of King. It will also maintain a net-zero enterprise of the various farming activities that consciously promotes ethical, sustainable farming practices, such as renewable energy and woodlot management. It will be phased operation with the first phase including a 18,700-square-metre (1.87-hectare) greenhouse plus the additional space for harvesting and packaging, warehouse, office, shipping/receiving, loading spaces, and employee/visitor parking. The horse track will be removed and the greenhouse will align over the track and the existing barn will be converted into the administration office. Subsequent phases to a full build out scenario will total 4.47 hectares. Existing hydro/power being supplied by the roof solar panels on the horse barn will be reused and eventually be supplemented by the proposed ground solar panels in phase two construction timeline and pending REA approvals. Light abatement strategy ? vertical walls will be made of sandwich panel and roof will integrate blackout screening ??is planned Councillor David Boyd pointed out that both he and Mayor Pellegrini met with Jay Willmot and his team last year, and learn more about their vision. ?It's great to see their innovative proposal coming to life. Kinghaven's model is based on sustainable farming with the goal of better than net zero greenhouse emissions made possible by solar energy. This proposal is well-suited for King Township, ? he said. Concerned Citizens of King Township (CCKT) ?enthusiastically supports the proposed expansion of agricultural uses on the Kinghaven Farm, ? according to member Bruce Craig. ?We commend the Wilmot family for including additional planting of trees for screening purposes, and we recognize that light from the greenhouses will be minimized through blackout features in the design. ?He said this is clearly an innovative forward-looking proposal in King's rural area which seeks to support the entire operation through renewable energy generated on the Kinghaven farm and surpass net zero goals. One of CCKT's main priorities is to support projects which sustain the natural heritage systems, productive farmland and rural land uses on the Oak Ridges Moraine

and throughout the Greenbelt Countryside. In addition, CCKT supports actions to expand clean, renewable power generation which are effective in addressing the climate emergency, improving air quality and contributing to healthy, sustainable, rural communities. In our view, this proposed greenhouse project with the adjacent arrays of solar panels is positive in many respects. It shows the vision and willingness of Kinghaven Farms to adapt their farm operations and adopt newer technology to meet current and future food needs and contribute to local food security in a region with growing population. In addition, the solar panels will provide additional renewable energy to the Ontario electricity grid and help in meeting important climate action goals. Of special significance, this greenhouse proposal supports sustaining the Greenbelt Countryside land for agricultural purposes for the long term in King Township. This is a big plus! Craig did note, though, that since greenhouses can emit considerable artificial light, it will be important that appropriate light abatement measures are planned in the design of this project. Craig asked whether Kinghaven Farms would be willing to return any areas of marginal farmland to forest, which once covered the rolling hills of Kinghaven Farms and many other parts of King Township, through the planting of suitable native tree and shrub species. This would enrich the bio-diversity of the area, and help sequester carbon, he said.