

Township recognizes long term care use on Marylake property

By Mark PavilonsEditorLocal Journalism Initiative

An information report by King Township staff caused an uproar among members of the public. In a follow-up to a potential proposal by the owners of Marylake Monastery north of King City, staff accepted the fact the property has been used for long term care purposes. While no application has been made, staff and councillors wanted full transparency, since it's a contentious local issue. Many delegations at the Feb. 8 virtual council meeting once again voiced their objections to a large-scale seniors housing complex on the property, even though no application is before the Township. Mayor Steve Pellegrini, several times during the evening meeting, pointed that fact out to delegates. He stressed all aspects to a recent request for a Ministerial Zoning Order made in December are off the table. Debating the pros and cons of any potential project was therefore moot. The only real information at hand was confirming the property has historically been used for long term care and it be recognized as such, should an application come forward in the future. This report stems from a 2019 request of Township staff by Augustinian Fathers (Ontario) Inc. (AFOI) whether a long-term care facility is permitted on the site. Staff confirmed it, noting they're satisfied that a long term care facility use has historically occurred on the Marylake property and continues and/or has been intended to continue to do so. Staff received documents from AFOI showing the long history of care services provided at the monastery. The level and extent of these services have fluctuated over time, but have been ongoing since the 1950s. That point was stressed by Quinto Annibale, speaking on behalf of the AFOI. The fathers and friars on site are old and ailing, and Marylake has cared for retired friars since the 1950s. The facility has been used as a convalescent home for retired friars and is well equipped. An infirmary was added in the 1980s complete with patient beds and medical equipment. The facility has been used for long-term care and palliative care. Resident Susan Swail, on behalf of two Oak Ridges Moraine organizations, wasn't convinced the property meets the threshold to qualify for long-term care use. It remains to be determined whether this site was used as institutional licensed long-term care home in the past, she said. She reiterated the fact the ORMCP does not support large-scale developments and in fact, a long-term care home is not a permitted use in the rural area of the ORMCP. Swail cautioned council not to rush through this proposal. One resident questioned whether this was the time to force a Field of Dreams scenario on the public to build it and they will come. Several residents also debated the necessity and scale of the project and lack of servicing. Some residents believe the site is too far from urban amenities, making it undesirable. But Annibale stressed that facilities tend to be outside urban areas for one main reason - the cost of land. The Province dissuades such facilities from being built on prime development land in urban areas. He said their plan is to relocate a long-term facility - Mariann Home - operated by the Missionary Sisters of the Precious Blood in Richmond Hill. It is a licensed, non-profit registered charity, caring for roughly 64 nursing home residents. They are funded and approved by the Province and hopes are the facility can move to Marylake. The request from staff was made to facilitate the transfer of bed licences, should the project move forward. The AFOI would be subsidizing the Sisters and not making any profit because it's the right thing to do, Annibale said. The plan would likely take two years to complete and Annibale noted King's new Official Plan would be in full effect and the project would have to abide by the new rules and guidelines. He said AFOI has spoken with York Region officials who said the use on this property seems compatible. The main source of public outcry is that the 800-acre property is situated on the Oak Ridges Moraine and there are many environmental safeguards that would prevent large-scale development. The AFOI isn't jumping the queue and any proposal is subject to approval from the Ministry, following full review. The public saw the report, and a suggestion to delegate site plan authority to the director of growth management services, as a way to fast-track the project. That recommendation was withdrawn. When council refused to endorse the MZO last year, they did recommend a round-table discussion take place with all stakeholders to see what is appropriate on the property. These discussions will include potential future uses and options for these lands. Staff noted that neither York Region nor TRCA identified any concerns or issues with the long-term care use. AFOI said they're prepared to engage in the talks. Staff noted there are many steps ahead, should AFOI choose to proceed. These include a pre-consultation process, a formal application and standard review process. One of the reasons it was suggested that the director of growth management services be delegated authority was in response to Marylake's request for a speedy process, especially during the summer months when council meets are not held regularly.