

Townhouse bid in King City falls short, residents say

By Mark PavilonsEditorLocal Journalism Initiative

While applicant and the Township are working to iron out concerns with a proposed townhouse project in King City, the matter is still headed to an LPAT hearing. Councillors, staff and members of the public offered input into Stateview Homes' plan to build 49 residential cluster townhouses on Keele Street. The applicants are seeking amendments to zoning and King's Official Plan to allow for the development. A public meeting was initially held in March 2019 and since then, both the applicant and Township staff have held working meetings. This led to two revised applications. The applications have been appealed to LPAT and a hearing is scheduled for this coming June. The outstanding issues include consideration for King's OP, the proposed density, environmental buffers and traffic concerns. The property is currently zoned established neighbourhood, which doesn't permit large-scale development. Townhouses are not considered a suitable use in this zoning. Staff said this application is fundamentally opposed to current planning rules and fails to meet many criteria. The applicant wants to redesignate the lands as medium density, but they're currently deemed low density, limited to 25 units per hectare. The bid is to up that to 40 units per hectare. King plans also require vegetative buffers of 30 meters adjacent to natural heritage features, and this plan has zones that vary from 20 to 46 metres. The application included three-storey townhouses, but the surrounding neighbourhood is largely single, detached homes. An architectural design is still under review. Staff have been working with the applicant to address compatibility, particularly the lots in the eastern and southern boundaries. Also, staff are concerned with some minimum lot areas, as well as front and side yard setbacks. Staff are also concerned with limited amenity space. They favour further revision to include fewer or small units, which would allow for better lot coverage and comply with zoning provisions. Staff noted concerns have been raised over access to the site and traffic generated. Residents have asked that traffic lights be installed. However, the current application does not propose any signals. At this time, staff will report back to the Committee of the Whole, prior to the LPAT hearing, to outline the status of the applications and any further revisions. Consultant Murray Evans, representing Stateview, said this plan has several credible elements and they've made changes to improve setbacks, in hopes to mitigating any impacts on existing residents. He admitted there's work to be done, mostly of a technical nature. The zoning standards, he contends, are reflective of an urban area. Their objective is to create a pedestrian-friendly street front. The issue of access is important to them, he said, noting they are working with the Township on the signal lights, perhaps at Norman. Bruce Craig, on behalf of Concerned Citizens of King Township (CCKT), said rows of townhouses will drastically change the streetscape. The combination of the five lots along the edge of the East Humber River Valley provides an excellent setting and opportunity to create an attractive residential subdivision with clusters of new homes that integrate well with the surrounding neighbourhood known as Heritage Park. However, in CCKT's view there would need to be significant changes to the present concept and site plan. Reducing the number of residential units and including two or three different forms of housing arranged carefully on this large parcel of land would address a number of concerns. Many mature trees could be preserved, impervious surface area reduced, the 30-metre buffer retained and a suitable transition to neighbouring lots achieved. The Established Neighbourhood designation in the new King Official Plan is intended to maintain the character and general fabric of the surrounding residential neighbourhood. The current proposal, with a density of 40 units/ha and blocks of three-storey townhouses does not achieve the goals or intent of the designation, the group points out. Regarding the revised site plan submitted by Stateview Homes in December 2020, CCKT recognizes several improvements, which include screening, retention of trees, wider planting strips, and more. CCKT said the density of proposal far exceeds what is envisioned in the Established Neighbourhood designation. The group would like the number of units reduced substantially. Craig pointed out that the blocks of townhouses stretching along Keele Street with small spaces between blocks is not appealing and does not complement and integrate well in the existing neighbourhood with a more open space character. They'd like to see the plan include single-detached, semi-detached, duplexes and/or one or two well-designed small blocks of two-storey townhouses carefully placed on the overall property to integrate well with homes in the existing neighbourhood. Also, the building heights of 12.5 metres is far beyond the heights of the surrounding residential units which are made up of bungalows, and two-storey dwellings. Heights need to be reduced. CCKT recommends a maximum height of 9.0 metres. CCKT advocates for retaining the full 30-metre buffer, and recommends that residential units and lots be adjusted to be completely outside of the buffer zone. CCKT, too, would like to see signalization at Norman Drive and the roadway entrance into High Crown Estates. Signals with sensors should be installed to allow the traffic to flow well on Keele Street, and to provide for

access on to Keele Street from Norman Drive and the High Crown Estates roadway in peak rush hour times. Dennison Drive should not be used for through traf?c in and out of this site.CCKT contends that with ?signi?cant revisions to the current site plan, a creative and attractive subdivision plan can be achieved that is well-received by the neighbouring community.?Resident Jennifer Hobbs, representing King Heritage Park Ratepayers Association, made a comprehensive presentation to council. Her group represents some 220 King City residents.While residents understand growth pressures, this development doesn't quite fit in with the neighbourhood and needs to be more forward-thinking.?If there is to be departure from the existing character of the neighbourhood, the development needs to provide adequate transition,? she said.The site includes many natural heritage features and is home to many mature trees and wildlife. The fear is many of these trees will be removed to make room for the development.Official Plan mandates, she said, include achieving a high degree of compatibility; minimizing impacts to vegetation, and having no negative impacts on adjacent properties.KHPRA, she stressed, is trying to ensure compatibility. The bid could change the design to soften the impact, and provide wider transition buffers.They suggest reducing the building height, setting buildings back further from the road, and planting larger streets.Increase traffic congestion is a major concern among residents. Hobbs said backups are common on Keele and this project will make matters even worse. It will add pressure to Keele and neighbouring streets, most of which don't have sidewalks.The proposal, KHPRA contends, has no park space, and no safe pedestrian crossing.The group said they're willing to work with the applicant and the Township to see a development that meets the needs of the community. There's a need to find a balance between growth and residents' safe enjoyment of their properties and the surrounding neighbourhood.?The latest changes to the proposal are an improvement, but still a long way from a plan that KHPRA would find acceptable.?A Martin Street resident said her street has become a shortcut for motorists, and traffic in her area is often at a standstill. She is concerned the new development will add to the mayhem in this family neighbourhood.She said there needs to be a plan for pedestrian safety, as well as adequate traffic calming measures.Mayor Steve Pellegrini said staff, through its traffic management plan, is always looking at speed limits in King's villages.Another man said the project still has many deficiencies and he'd like to see two sets of traffic lights in the area.