

Genview seeks another extension for sales office on Museum site

By Angela Gismondi

The developer who is using part of the King Township Museum as a new home sales office wants to have their contract extended, but King council wants something in return.

The sales office is part of the Genview plan of subdivision, located on the north side of King Road, east of Jane Street. Two years ago, Genview developments proposed a unique partnership with the Township. They agreed to renovate the King Township Museum and in return they would use a portion of the renovated building as their sales office. The project has been delayed for various reasons and this is not the first time the developer has asked for an extension to continue to use the museum building. Because the property is zoned institutional, a sales office does not fit in with the permitted uses and therefore a temporary use bylaw is needed to permit the operation of the sales office on the site.

The Genview plan of subdivision has not yet been registered, explained Gaspare Ritacca of the Township's planning department. The owners of the lands have entered into a subdivision agreement with the Township. Planning staff is waiting finalization of various matters by Genview, which are required prior to registration.

Ritacca added that Genview is eligible to build a model home on the property if they choose to.

Claudio Brutto came forward at the meeting on behalf of Genview. Although his clients will be putting up a model home on the site, this could take months to complete, he explained. Brutto argued the area where the sales office is was used for storage.

"We're not encumbering the full use of the museum," Brutto stated.

Brutto explained that the project was originally delayed because of structural and other problems during renovations to the old museum building. The current weather has been slowing things down even further.

Councillor Deb Schaefer didn't like the idea of granting the builder another extension.

"I was shocked and extremely upset when I read this report," said Schaefer, adding what upset her the most is the timing and the fact that the contract terminates at the end of this month.

"It seems to me there is a gun to my head ? either we approve this or you're going to be selling these houses out of a tent and a tent is not the place to sell these beautiful homes," said Schaefer.

"The project management behind it is what I find really annoying and it doesn't make me feel good about it," said Schaefer, adding there is a lack of certainty, urgency and respect when it comes to the project. "This is an important site. I am very opposed to this report as presented."

Schaefer is particularly concerned about ability of the public and the volunteers to utilize the museum. She added that she was one of the councillors who supported the project.

"I got a lot of grief from people saying we were selling our soul and spirit by doing this," said Schaefer. "I'm really beginning to feel like I'm selling my soul to whoever comes along and offers."

She concluded the Township would have to discuss with the developer how to proceed and "how to make it worthwhile to us to continue with this setup."

Councillor Cleve Mortelliti asked if the museum board has taken a position on the extension of the contract. Chris Fasciano, director of parks, recreation and culture said the board hasn't met since the notice was put out. They will be meeting this week.

"I would like to see the museum board get on board with this extension," said Mortelliti. "If they don't, I don't think I'll have a level of comfort with this."

Brutto explained that preliminary works have begun and the weather is making it difficult to complete other parts of the project. At this point over 50 per cent of the 65 lots have been sold.

"I would expect to see activity on external services as soon as the weather starts to break," said Brutto. "We do ask for your indulgence. We realize there is frustration. We hope there is a middle ground we can reach."

Mayor Steve Pellegrini said he made it clear last time that he would only grant one extension.

"It's a gateway to the township and we want to utilize that space now," said Pellegrini. "It's a programming area that the community is looking forward to."

Councillor Bill Cober said if council is going to grant the extension, they are going to ask for something in return. He said he would be in favour of anything that would save money for taxpayers.

Brutto agreed to sit down with Township staff to discuss the matter over the next week.