

Committee approves minor variances at Marylake

By Mark PavilonsEditor

King's Committee of Adjustment approved four minor variances related to a long-term care facility at Marylake. The committee meeting Wednesday evening only heard from a small number of residents (some of whom spoke the previous week). The committee members were satisfied with answers from staff, and while public opposition is still prevalent, they support staff recommendations on the variances. The variances only dealt with the facility's size and height, loading dock requirements and parking spots. Committee chair for the night Cleve Mortelliti stressed they were not there to weigh the arguments for or against the facility. He also noted committee members pressed staff on all the issues, so they were prepared for a decision. This matter, he stressed, was a learning experience for committee members. The Augustinian Fathers (Ontario), Inc. are proposing a three-storey, 128-unit long term care facility, covering roughly the same area as the current footprint of the buildings on site. One resident who spoke noted this application is "troubling" and there's no evidence of historic use to justify a LTC on this site. Another resident said it's unclear whether council has given its support to the project, and there's no available servicing in the area.

She can't "fathom" how municipal services will be extended to the site. Former MP Deb Schulte noted the proposed expansion is "too big," and it's by no means minor. She urged the matter go back to council for debate. Mary Muter, of Kingscross Ratepayers Association, said her group has a pending Freedom of Information request about the proposal and any decision should wait until they have those answers. At the April 19 committee meeting, Susan Walmer pointed out the proposal does not conform to King's Official Plan. Residents questioned the size of the expansion and even staff's analysis and conclusions. Debbe Crandall of STORM said data justifying the plan on the Oak Ridges Moraine was lacking. In February 2021, council received a report from staff, 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. 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." That decision was made before an actual application was made by AFOI. Now that one is on the table, staff are reviewing just like any application. In recommending approval of the variances, staff said: "It is our opinion, the proposal not only meets this test, but it also constitutes good planning and it serves an important community need, providing much needed long term care beds in King Township." Quinto Annibale, speaking on behalf of the AFOI, pointed out each of the minor variances actually reduce the impacts on the site, not increase them. The idea to reduce the impact was to go up, not out. In the end, they're also paving less. He said the variances meet the requirements of acceptable use and low impact. The LTC on this large property is a legal non-conforming use. In responding to arguments of intensity and historic use, Annibale said they don't have to establish continuous use. The ministry has approved conditional funding for the facility. He also noted this application is not precedent-setting and it's a one-off, likely the only one King will ever see. He said Township staff put the applicants through the ringer with a full suite of studies, including environmental reports. They all conclusively show no negative impacts on the natural features or Mary Lake itself. "This location is as good, if not the best, anywhere in the township," he said. "It's a shame that so many spoke against such a desirable use." Annibale said those who said the impacts on the Oak Ridges Moraine are "dire" are baseless, creating unsupported apprehension. The facility will be run as a non-profit organization and will be open to anyone, based on need, established by the ministry. The current building is in dire need of replacement and the new facility will be a net benefit to the environment. Annibale said they commissioned Abacus Data to conduct a poll in King. The results show that the majority "85%" support the plan. There is only a "small vocal minority" that's opposed. The expansion of the St. Rita at Marylake Long-Term Care Home is a chance to provide modern, quality long-term care for more residents and their families in our community. The site plan application remains under review by the Township and other agencies. Staff anticipate the review will be completed some time in mid-2023. Site Plan applications are approved at the staff level, not council. King Township has one of the lowest ratios of beds per seniors over 85 years of age in Ontario. With only 36 long-term care beds for over 27,000 residents and a long waitlist for these beds, our community requires a modern, accessible long-term care home for our seniors and their families.