

Concerned Citizens get answers regarding Magna development

By Angela Gismondi

Concerned Citizens of King Township (CCKT) is supportive of Magna's decision to move its international head office to from Aurora to King, but some of its members are worried about how the proposed development will affect King's rural countryside. Magna is a leading global automotive supplier, with 316 manufacturing operations and 87 product development, engineering and sales centres in 29 countries and employs over 133,000 people worldwide.

CCKT hosted a special meeting on the proposed employment development following its annual general meeting June 23.

Greg Locke, chair of CCKT, opened the meeting with some background on the matter. Two years ago, another developer challenged the zoning on the lands. They wanted to construct a retail plaza on the property, which raised concerns with the developer of the Dufferin-King retail plaza, who ended up taking the developer to the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) over the plan and CCKT joined as a participant. Late last year, it became public that the developer of the King-Dufferin plaza had cancelled its appeal to the OMB.

‘Magna was looking for an investment-ready location to consolidate several GTA area facilities into a new global head office and research facility,’ said Locke.

‘These lands met that criteria and more and their plans meet and even exceed the expectations we had hoped for these lands. We will have a significant industrial entity located in our community, one that will contribute much needed tax dollars to our municipality. Magna is known to invest in the communities it has facilities. Long term King will benefit substantially by this and our residents ? some here now, some who will move here as a result of Magna's investment ? will be able to live and work right here. So for these reasons and more, CCKT is doing the ‘happy dance’ for Magna.’

Jay Claggett and Chuck Beamish of IBI group, the architecture, planning, engineering and technology firm in charge of the project, were on hand at the CCKT meeting to make a presentation and answer questions on the proposed employment development.

The design team explained the new international headquarters would be located at the south east corner of King Road and Jane Street in King City and consists of a three storey office building (about 200,000 square feet), a research and development facility (about 120,000 square feet), recreational facilities which include a baseball diamond, soccer field, swimming pool and accessory park facilities for private use (about 16,500 square feet), a combination of surface and structure parking (about 153,000 square feet) with a total of 750 spaces.

In terms of the design, the proposed office building has been located to frame the Jane Street and King Road corner. It will consist of a ‘centre cube’ with two flanking structures. A contemporary architectural design which reflects the prestige employment nature of the area is being proposed.

‘What we're attempting to do is have a centralized knuckle that punctuates the corner of King and Jane and acts as a gateway in and out of town,’ said Beamish, adding the proposed design is preliminary and is subject to change.

A covered parking structure will be located on the site with 250 surface parking spots and the remainder will be under a green parking deck.

‘It's an open air structure so there is no need for mechanical ventilation,’ explained Beamish, adding there will be 75 per cent green coverage on the parking deck.

Magna has applied to the Township for zoning bylaw amendments, Beamish explained. The King City Community Plan designates the lands as Prestige Employment Area and Environmental Protection Area. The lands are currently used for agricultural purposes. Portions of the property include environmentally sensitive areas as well. Magna has no plans to touch the archaeological site on the property.

Although they plan to stay within the Township's three-storey limit for the building, Magna is requesting relief on the height for the research and development facility and the main office building. Given the rolling topography of the land, the one-storey research and development facility will appear slightly lower than the main building, he said.

‘When I first came to see the site, I was absolutely blown away,’ explained Beamish. ‘We want to preserve the land forms, use internal landforms such as the ravine to maintain the natural storm water flow and naturalize some of the biological areas where we can.’

The applications are proposing to develop only the western 40-acre parcel of land on a 104 acre property. There are no development proposals for balance of the property and the owner has not identified any intentions to develop those lands at this time.

‘Magna is a company that plans to be around for a long time and they want to be able to expand,’ noted Beamish, adding there are no plans to incorporate a retail facility on the property. ‘This is their flagship and Magna attracts co-industries that want to be

located near them but I don't think they've turned their mind to that yet.?

Members of CCKT were mostly concerned about the impact the development would have on the environmentally protected property. They also asked about sustainability and green initiatives.

Beamish explained there is the potential to put solar panels on the roof of the research facility and they are looking into other green initiatives as well such as effective energy modeling, LEED initiatives, landscaping and naturalizing the area. Local resident Bruce Craig brought up the idea of a geothermal heating system. Beamish replied that the decisions regarding sustainability initiatives have not been finalized, but are being considered.

?Certainly that is something that would be a great winner and the breakeven is not too far down the road,? he said.

One woman asked if Magna would consider implementing green space on all the buildings.

?That amount of green space in a building of that size is four times the LEED requirement,? explained Beamish. ?It's a question of balance. It does become a maintenance issue and in some cases, can lead to the deterioration of the building itself.?

Residents were also concerned about the contemporary design of the building, stating the building is ?quite a departure from the Aurora facility.?

?To my eye, it looks like a city building,? said one resident. ?Can something be done to give it more of a country flare??

?Can we add loads of trees so it looks like King Township and won't be so sterile,? asked another concerned citizen.

Claggett responded that it's important to Magna that the building fits in the community.

?Being respectful of the flavor of King is something we would not take lightly,? said Claggett. ?But this is their global headquarters, this is what they will be showing to the world. It's a contemporary company ? It is not our intention to drop a city building in the countryside. Our design will be much more nuanced. We will be taking your concerns seriously.?

Traffic was another concern for local residents.

?This is not a high production facility,? said Beamish. ?Research is the focus.?

But 600 employees could mean a lot of extra cars, plus truck traffic going in and out of the facility, residents pointed out.

Claggett said the traffic consultants have recommended some improvements and signalization for roads around the facility.

?There is no getting around the fact that there are 600 employees,? he said. ?There will be traffic. Magna is cognizant of the traffic impact and also trying to accommodate their employees with a shuttle from the GO station.?

?Until the traffic is dealt with, all this does is make everybody's life miserable that lives here,? noted one resident. ?I applaud the idea but what I would applaud more is infrastructure to deal with that traffic.?

Mayor Steve Pellegrini, who also attended the meeting, responded to the concern.

?I want to be crystal clear ? this is a regional road,? he stated. ?It is not warranted to put lights there. Magna is coming forward and saying ?we want to do that.' The road is able to handle the traffic volume so we're not going to be increasing the size of the road.

King is not going to be a growth centre where they are investing like Newmarket ? For us, the biggest issue is enforcement, we have to pay for more policing.?

Impact on the tax base was another subject that was addressed at the meeting. Pellegrini pointed out that currently Kings tax base is primarily residential.

?With all the growth in King, we need this just so we don't go backwards,? replied Pellegrini, adding he does not know the exact impact on taxes. ?One or two per cent at the most ? no your taxes won't go down but they won't go up as much. Yes, this is going to change it (the tax base) and we need more of it. Once Magna gets settled, I will be on them to develop the rest of the 60 acres.?

Magna has a very ambitious timeline for the project. They plan to submit a site plan application to the Township this summer, obtain approval by the end of the year and have shovels in the ground by the beginning of next year. After an 18 to 24 month construction period, they are expecting full occupancy by the fall of 2017.