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Council pleased with Magna proposal

By Angela Gismondi

Magna International has taken the first step in bringing its global headquarters to King.
A public meeting was held Monday to discuss the zoning bylaw amendment application for the employment area complex, which would be located at the south east corner of King Road and Jane Street in King City. Magna, a leading global automotive supplier, has decided to move its head office from Aurora to King. Magna has 316 manufacturing operations and 87 product development, engineering and sales centres in 29 countries and employs over 133,000 people worldwide.
The proposed new development 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.
During a presentation at the meeting, Stephen Kitchen, director of planning for King, explained the subject application constitutes a new application and is not related to the previous KCCC applications, he added.
The current zoning amendment application, submitted by Magna in May, proposes to develop only the western 40-acre parcel of land on a 104-acre property located at the southeast corner of King Road and Jane Street. The balance of the property is not part of the zoning amendment application, there are no development proposals for the property at this time and the owner has not identified any intentions to develop those lands, Kitchen explained.
?In the future, the applicant will determine what will happen with the remainder 60 acres in cooperation with the Township,? explained Jay Claggett, a planner with IBI?Group.
The application proposes to amend the requirements for side yard minimum, height maximum and parking. The applicant is also requesting to rezone the subject lands from ?rural general? to ?restricted industrial ? exception? to permit the proposed development.
Claggett explained that the applicant plans to stay within the Township's three-storey limit for the building but is requesting relief on the height of the structures as the research and development facility in particular, needs additional height requirements. Given the rolling topography of the land, the one-storey research and development facility will appear slightly lower than the main building, he said. The applicant also plans to incorporate some architectural features into the main office building which will require additional height.
The King City Community Plan designates the lands as Prestige Employment Area and Environmental Protection Area which permits office uses, research, education and training uses, institutional uses; data processing and related facilities, light industrial uses displaying high design standards and community and neighbourhood parks and parkettes. Kitchen noted that it may be more appropriate to introduce a new zone category to better reflect the proposed prestige employment land use and development form as the current zone is part of a zoning bylaw enacted in 1974 which predates the King City Community Plan. A new zone category would reflect the currently policy framework and design guidelines.
?We are willing to work with staff on what is the appropriate zoning category for the lands,? said Claggett.
Chuck Beamish, an architect with IBI group, said 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 covered parking structure located further internal to the site. A contemporary architectural design which reflects the prestige employment nature of the area is being proposed, Beamish said. He noted the proposed design, including the proposed buildings, are preliminary at this time and remain subject to change.
Magna plans to submit an application for site plan approval this summer, which will address the proposed site development, servicing, grading, and other similar elements in detail.
?We designed the building in such a way that it will form a gateway structure into the Township,? said Beamish, adding the applicant is planning to maintain the ravine and the topography throughout the site.
Magna is also committed to incorporating green initiatives into the project.
?Sustainability is a subject Magna wants to work through with in the design of the whole site,? said Beamish. ?It's important to our client that the landscape becomes a key feature in the success of this project.?
As for the archaeological site located on the property, Claggett said Magna plans to preserve it.
?Magna has put it into their ownership so they can control it but they are planning to leave it as is ? there will be no grading or change in the topography,? stated Claggett. ?The intent is to preserve it. There is no intention, certainly not from Magna, of proposed retail in that section.?

The proposed development also includes recreation amenities such as soccer fields, baseball diamonds and a swimming pool which are intended for their private use by staff only. The Township's parks, recreation and culture department is looking into the potential opportunity for joint use of these facilities for Township recreation purposes.

Members of council were pleased with what they heard and welcomed the proposal with open arms.

?I'm just sitting here wondering if your white horses are parked outside,? said Councillor Cleve Mortelliti. ?I am ecstatic and I know all of council is. You're hitting all the right notes with everything that you're saying.?

Councillor Debbie Schaefer was also excited to hear the developer's plans for the site and in particular that they are ?seeking to use the uniqueness of the site.? Ultimately, she would like to see all the hydro lines underground, she added.

?This is such a great attitude to be showing us,? said Schaefer.

Councillor Bill Cober echoed the positive feedback, stating ?this is a fantastic opportunity for King.? He was curious about the timeline for the project. Claggett responded Magna plans to submit a site plan application 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.

?Magna wants to be very clear that staff have been outstanding in terms of expediting and working with us,? said Claggett.

Cober added that if any additional resources are needed to support that timeline, staff could approach the council.

?If we did need additional resources to move this through, we would have no hesitation in coming to you for that level of support to meet these deadlines,? said Township CAO Susan Plamondon.

Councillor Linda Pabst was also pleased with the proposal.

?It's enlightening to see such a wonderful thing come to King and be a highlight of King City,? said Pabst.

Councillor Avia Eek pointed out the Township has been working hard on economic development and it's nice to see those strategies and plans come through with help and leadership from staff.

?It's wonderful that we have been able to attract a business of your caliber,? said Eek.

Mayor Steve Pellegrini didn't hide his enthusiasm for the proposed development.

?It's the jewel in the crown of King,? said Pellegrini. ?We're very thankful to Magna that they chose to stay in York Region, in Ontario and, for that matter, in Canada. It's York Region's gain that Magna is staying in this community. We're getting a corporate partner in this municipality that really is setting King above the rest. We're looking forward to working with you.?

A representative from the King United Soccer Club came forward at the meeting to inquire whether or not Magna would consider opening up its recreational facility to the public.

?We recognize the area is for private use but want to know if there is any opportunity or future possibility of those facilities becoming accessible to the public,? he said.

Claggett responded that at this point the facilities are designated for private use but ?it's not a dead issue for Magna? and ?they are considering it.?

Councillor David Boyd added Magna presents a wonderful addition to King in terms of economic development, but he is hoping they can work on the social and cultural aspect in terms of the recreational facility.

?If we could facilitate some sort of shared use agreement that would be a wonderful thing as well,? said Boyd.

Susan Beharriell had some comments about the sustainable nature of the development. She asked that the building be constructed to LEED certification standards and include other green elements inside and out such as permeable paving, solar panels and a green roof. She also suggested that the developer consider building and Energy Plus Building.

Lisa Gilbert, general manager at the Kingbridge Conference Centre, is looking forward to working with Magna International.

?We look forward to creating a partnership and to having a new neighbour across the street from us,? said Gilbert.

She expressed some concern over the possible impact on traffic flow on Jane Street and the ability for guests to access the centre.

Claggett explained the main access point for the proposed development will be a north-south private road/driveway located east of Jane and will be aligned with the future road on the north side of King Road. This intersection is proposed to be fully signalized. An additional limited (right-in/right out) access point is proposed from King Road approximately mid-block between Jane Street and the future private road. Another access point will be primarily for truck access and will be a fully signalized intersection from Jane Street.

The zoning bylaw amendment application was received and referred back to staff for further review.