

Revised plan offers little improvement, residents say

By Mark PavilonsEditor

Revisions to a multi-storey development in King City prompted Township staff and members of the public to weigh in on the matter. While the proponents made alterations, opposition to the large-scale building has mounted, with some calling it a monstrosity. The proposal, and Official Plan amendments proposed by the developer for a King City apartment project, are still being appealed to the Ontario Land Tribunal (OLT). The appeals are scheduled to be heard by OLT on May 2. Council has given direction to staff to continue to oppose the development at the hearing. The applicants are seeking site plan approval to permit a 5-to-six-storey apartment building, with 159 units on Keele Street and Elizabeth Grove in King City. The proposal dates back to 2020 and the applicants provided updates to council through 2021. On Dec. 22, 2021, Township staff received further revisions to the project. As it stands, the applicants are still asking for an OPA and zoning bylaw amendment, along with site plan approval. They are now proposing a reduction to 159 units from 166, with an additional 6 parking spots. Direct connections have been provided from the ground floor units to the public sidewalk along Keele. Seating areas, consisting of interlocking surfaces, are identified at the sight triangles along Keele. Balconies on the north side of the building have been removed and there's additional stepping back of the building on the third and fifth levels at the north end and east side. As well, the proponents will widen Elizabeth with a right-turn lane on Keele. A 148-square-metre amenity area has been added to the east property line, including a dog run. Lighter colour building materials have been incorporated above the second storey. The height of the building has been increased by roughly two metres, but shortened by three metres. Township staff have been working with the applicant to address the outstanding matters that were brought up during the September 2020 public meeting, and subsequent council meeting. Among the top concerns were compatibility with adjacent residential areas, visual impact, green features, parking and more. In King's Official Plan, the subject lands are designated as "Transit Station Area," which allow for medium and higher densities, including apartment buildings. Staff have also been working with the developer on green space, setbacks, frontages and façade design elements. Progress has been made on many fronts but it's still a high density building, set among detached residential homes. The project does include 348 square metres of indoor amenities and 492 square meters of outdoor space on levels 2 and 6. Staff do want to see more amenity space at grade level. The Township is still pushing for green features such as green roofs, electric vehicle charging stations and solar ready rooftops. Township staff are preparing for the appeal hearing, which is estimated to cost roughly \$125,000. It's uncertain at this time how long the hearing will take. Opponents were vocal at the recent council meeting, reiterating the fact this project has no place at this locale. Resident Susan Beharriell said the company seems to have no concept of really listening to the government or the people of the village and the Township in which they want to build. "Not only are the developers not listening, but they also not acting in the best interests of the community. This proposed monolith does not meet the village design guidelines, does not fit into this heritage Ontario village, does not provide the parkland required and does not address the important drainage issues," she said. Beharriell wanted to know whether the building would include any green features, bringing it up to par with the vision contained in King's Climate Action Plan. She pointed out that opposition to this plan is not opposition to all forms of growth. It is not a matter of NIMBYISM at all. "The legislation that the applicant is asking to change has been created by many people after much debate, research and consideration for all our futures," she observed. She asked councillors and to "carefully consider your direction and have staff fight the good fight to ensure that the requested exemptions are not granted without significant modifications to the present application. "Let it be an addition to King City of which we can all be proud. In its present form, it brings none of these assets." Bruce Craig, on behalf of Concerned Citizens of King Township (CCKT) recognizes the importance of building "complete communities" with a variety of forms of housing, job opportunities and community amenities. With this in mind, CCKT supports "reasonable" intensification which respects the King Official Plan and the King City Community Plan and integrates well with the existing neighbourhoods and the historic Keele Street streetscape. The density of the site contrasts with the density of the existing Clearview Heights subdivision "the proposed apartment building is almost 50X the density. He questioned whether the project reflects the historic character of the core area and whether it fits with King's vision. He pointed out that effective community design results in the building of compatible and desirable places and contributes to the economic vitality and health of a community. It requires collaboration between the private and public sector on the delivery of excellence and innovation in the planning, design and construction of new developments and the surrounding public realm within the Township. Craig said many questions and aspects of

the proposal are still not clear ? landscape plan, suitable amenity spaces, effective buffers/planting strips to the neighbouring residential lots, clear details on making this a sustainable building design. While CCKT supports a reasonable measure of intensification in the GO Transit Station Area and the Core Area of King City, plus the introduction of a variety of forms of housing, we believe the current proposal does not reflect the vision and policies of the King Official Plan, nor the King City Community Plan. We believe a better outcome can be achieved. We strongly recommend that the proponent enter into respectful collaboration with the Township and the public to create a multi-unit residential building which integrates well with the adjacent neighbourhood, reinforces the historic character of Keele Street, and is designed and constructed with a very high degree of sustainability and energy efficiency. One woman said a group of citizens has spent a considerable amount of time and resources on this issue, which matters very much to them. They've garnered more than 100 signatures of residents who want this revisited. They want to see good development, with a mix of retail and more open spaces, to create more of a main street feel. The pedestrian experience has to be improved, she said. Dennis and Bonnie Mooney, owners of 30 Clearview Heights, pointed to the detriment this development will have on the use and enjoyment of our property, but its impact on our village, King City. They will be completely overshadowed by the large building. We will lose significant hours of sunlight throughout the year which will impact the productivity our vegetable gardens and landscaping. Even the existing condominium on King Road, west of Keele Street does not impact the neighbouring homes to the east to this extent. Should there not be the same consideration for adjacent housing be given in this case? Dennis said there are so many issues with the current proposed development, that it is hard to know where to start. The size of the structure is unlike anything existing in King City at the present time. The design doesn't reflect the character of the local neighbourhood. The development would have a better chance of starting to blend into the neighbouring area if the building were to be split into two parts with an open space in between - as was proposed in some earlier submissions. There is very little green space and nowhere for children to play freely outdoors. The latest proposal seeks to have a zero clearance setback from the rear yard property line to built structures, such as the retaining wall and roadway and the underground parking. This proposal has zero provision for landscaped buffering along most of the east boundary ? it even indicates that trees will have to be removed from adjacent properties for construction to proceed. Mooney said without provision for service businesses in the area, there will be little incentive for residents to get out into the neighbourhood and meet nearby residents. The units will likely be expensive and rented out by speculators. This, he said, doesn't serve in any way to satisfy the provincially driven goal of satisfying the demand for new housing units. There is an aspect of this proposal that represents a frightening prospect for the residents in the adjacent subdivision, Mooney said. There is reference to roof top cooling towers that will necessitate the very tall mechanical penthouse screens for sound abatement. Roof-top cooling towers are known to be potential harbours for legionella bacteria and should never be installed beside a residential area, especially when the residential area is downwind from the source. Another Clearview Heights resident said he's disappointed the matter is being appealed to the Tribunal. He said it's fueled by ill intentions, adding he can't even see how construction at this site could be done in a safe manner. Tom Halinski, municipal and land use planning lawyer for the Township, is optimistic that the OLT likely won't deny many of the Township's requests in this matter. Gaspare Ritacca, manager of planning and development, said the Official Plan dictates what the municipality's vision is for the property, but admitted it is identified for more density. Councillor Debbie Schafer agreed there haven't been any meaningful improvements through the various iterations. There's zero commitment to sustainable features, she said. Councillor David Boyd noted this application far-reaching impacts across King. This is a big one; it's important, he observed. Councillor Jordan Cescolini said with each revision, this project is moving further away from what the Township wants. He told residents that council is listening and it will use every tool it has in this case.