

Schomberg development raises environmental concerns

By Angela Gismondi

A small residential development proposed for Schomberg has some residents concerned about the potential negative impact on the surrounding environment.

A public meeting was held this past Monday to discuss the official plan and zoning bylaw amendment applications submitted by Brownsville Junction Ltd. regarding the four-unit residential townhome development proposed to be located at the corner of Dr. Kay Drive and Cooper Drive.

The property is located in the northwest corner of a larger commercial property, located on the west side of Highway 27, south of Dr. Kay Drive which currently houses a commercial shopping plaza, explained Stephen Kitchen, director of planning for the Township of King, at the meeting Monday. The official plan amendment application proposes to re-designate a vacant portion of the lands, located at the northwest corner of the property, from Environmental Constraint Area to Medium Density Residential. The zoning bylaw amendment application proposes to rezone the lands from Shopping Centre Commercial ? Exception to Residential Urban (Schomberg) Four ? Exception in order to facilitate the construction of the townhouses.

There have also been rumors that potential developers have been looking at the larger commercial property too - meaning more developments may come to the area. However, commercial property surveyors are yet to assess the building so there is no guarantee a deal will be made.

Previously under the same official plan amendment file number, the owner proposed to re-designate the same portion of lands to District Commercial to permit a professional office building. However, the applicant changed the plan after a town hall meeting last February, at which time residents expressed their desire to see residential units in that location, rather than a commercial building. One of the biggest concerns expressed by local residents at the public meeting is that a portion of the land in question is located in a floodplain and an environmental constraint area near the Dufferin Marsh, which houses environmentally sensitive features and habitat.

While primary access to the townhouses is proposed from Cooper Drive, because the property is in a floodplain the owners are also proposing an emergency pedestrian access from the existing commercial plaza located at the rear (east side) of the development.

"The applicant is proposing pedestrian culvert crossings over an existing drainage ditch and to install gates in a wood privacy fence for access to each townhome in the event of a flood," said Kitchen. "The applicant's agent identified that easements or other legal documents will be provided across the commercial property for pedestrian access."

Councillor Avia Eek doesn't think the development represents good planning.

"I'm always dead against building in a floodplain," said Eek, adding it will cost the municipality, the province and the homeowners. "It's just not a good idea."

Councillor Cleve Mortelliti pointed out that just because an area is designated environmental constraint, doesn't mean development can't occur there, it just means various tests need to be done to determine if a development is appropriate in that location. He also pointed out that a commercial development might make more sense in that location as the property backs onto the plaza's loading dock.

Bob Hodgson, of W.R. Hodgson and Associates, the agent for the applicant, explained the decision to change the plan from commercial to residential came from public feedback at the town hall meeting last year.

"The general public made certain comments that they did not really like the fact that a commercial development is being proposed," said Hodgson. "They would prefer more townhouses versus a business/commercial type of development."

He also said that he has received confirmation in writing from the Lake Simcoe Conservation Authority that the flood line elevation is lower than originally documented, which means most of the property is not in an environmental constraint area, only part of the driveway and Cooper Drive are located in the floodplain.

"The studies have been completed and it's not in an environmental constraint area," said Hodgson.

With respect to the Township's request for a sidewalk, he said a sidewalk already exists and putting one in would be a lot of work and would require going through the environmental constraint area.

Mayor Steve Pellegrini pointed out that there is no sidewalk and what the agent was referring to is more of a bike and pedestrian pathway.

Local resident Barbara Burt said she was satisfied with the revised applications.

"I think it will finish off the area and it will not bring as much traffic into the area as a professional building would have," said Burt.

"I don't see the need for a sidewalk if it's going to be an environmental issue."

Charles Cooper of the Dufferin Marsh Committee said he does not support development of any kind on the lands. He pointed out that the development in that area in Schomberg has already stressed the wetlands.

"We firmly believe development has had a significant negative impact on the marsh," said Cooper, adding there is a high salt concentration in the stormwater management pond. "Before you consider this plan any further, please consider the long term affects to the Dufferin Marsh."

He did agree with the developer that the sidewalk does not need to be extended as it would be cutting through the environmental area on the east side of the street.

"I can see that causing problems in the future," said Cooper. "It actually creates more difficulty."

Greg Locke also came forward on behalf of Concerned Citizens of King Township.

"Why are we considering building on an identified floodplain, in an Environmental Constraint Area, next to a significant designated environmental feature, the Dufferin Marsh?" asked Locke. "The zone didn't happen by accident ? it was a result of thought and effort to preserve a sensitive area within the village Our area has been experiencing changing weather patterns that include much more intense rainfalls. Hence it is even more important not to build on flood plains."

According to Locke the owner agreed to construct and maintain a private storm water management and oil grit separation structures in order to gain permission to construct the plaza additions he sought in the 1990s. That was a requirement that was agreed to, and the owner benefitted from it and continues to do so, Locke explained. Those requirements were formalized in a Site Plan Agreement dated July 17, 1998 and they required the owner to regularly clean and inspect the grit separators semi annually and to report the finding to the Township.

"CCKT can find no evidence that these requirements have ever been fulfilled," stated Locke. "There is no documentation in the Township file other than correspondence going back and forth over several years asking the owner to comply. There is no evidence that the owner ever did comply ... Yet here we are, considering whether to allow the owner to construct directly into the flood plain, with the risks and burdens of ensuring that no further environmental degradation will occur."

Councillor Debbie Schaefer said the houses don't fit in with the surroundings.

"Is this really a place that you put a few houses ? in the corner of a commercial district?" asked Schaefer. "We've got to be thinking about 10 years from now, 15 years from now ... I just don't see how that fits in with the kind of community we're trying to build."

The applications were received and referred back to staff for further review.