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Seneca College seeks bylaw amendment to expand King Campus

By Angela Gismondi

Seneca College is asking King for a little help in facilitating their expansion plans.

Seneca is expanding its King campus but in order to facilitate the development of two multi-storey buildings, the college is requesting an increase to the Township's building height provisions for the institutional zone.

Seneca College has submitted an application to the Township to amend the zoning bylaw for the King campus property, located Dufferin Street and the 15th Sideroad. A public meeting was held on the matter Monday. The Township's current bylaw limits the height of buildings in institutional zones to 11 metres. Seneca's application proposes to increase the maximum building height to 30 metres, which means the building could be up to six storeys high.

The Seneca property currently houses several institutional buildings, parking areas, recreational facilities and accessory buildings associated with the academic programming of the college. The two new proposed buildings will include an academic building and a student federation and athletic building, explained Stephen Kitchen, director of planning for the Township of King. The site for the buildings is currently occupied by parking lots situated between the building known as Garriock Hall and an athletic track.

?The expansion of the King Campus was identified in the Master Plan for Seneca College that began in 2010 which also includes the Newham and Markham campuses,? said Kitchen. ?The college is currently working with Infrastructure Ontario and their consultants to move ahead with the expansion project.?

The applicant was on-hand to address members of council and the public at the meeting Monday. The last time they made a presentation to council was in 2012.

?We're delighted to be here now to make that plan come into action,? said Daniel Atlin, vice president of strategy and college affairs at Seneca College. ?We think we have a very strong plan. This project is very important to Seneca. Seneca hasn't been through a significant renovation and modernization since it was first built in 1971. It's well overdue.?

Being responsible leaders and stewards of the property is important to Seneca.

?We want to make sure we develop a sustainable plan,? said Atlin. ?We recognize that we are stewards of this wonderful asset and we want to make sure we develop this in a way that meets the needs of not only the current students but the future as well.?

Seneca hopes the expansion leads to partnerships with other post secondary institutions down the road, he added.

Antonio Gomez-Palacio of DIALOG Design said that the two buildings will support the character of a college and will function like a village within the campus.

?It's about increasing the quality and character of being on campus,? he explained. ?These are the first two key parts of creating that central courtyard. It's going to enhance the experience for students on the King campus. ?

The reason the college is requesting the height exemption, he said, is to maintain a small footprint on the site.

?We're trying to do as compact a design as possible,? said Gomez-Palacio. ?What we are very cautious about is maintaining the rural character of the campus and the natural setting.?

The request for qualifications has been released and Seneca is seeking potential developers to build the expansion. The winner will be selected in 2016 and occupancy is expected in 2017.

?This is very real, we're moving forward and we are certainly very excited about it,? said Gomez-Palacio. ?For us it is a step in the process but it is a huge milestone.?

The proposed buildings would be seeking LEED-Gold certification and Seneca plans to incorporate other conservation measures as well, he added.

Councillor Debbie Schaefer was concerned that if council approves the height increase, the college could come back and ask for more exemptions in the future.

Atlin assured Schaefer there are no plans for further expansion at this time.

?Currently we have no plans for other buildings,? he said. ?Right now we're focused on this project.?

She also wanted to ensure the important heritage buildings on campus are preserved.

?These buildings are important to us from a cultural perspective and also define our Township,? explained Schaefer.

Mayor Steve Pellegrini pointed out that the ground-breaking for the expansion took place four years ago the build out is still another three years away. Another phase of the project would be many years away.

?Seneca has been very good to this municipality,? said Pellegrini. ?There is a huge economic impact with this and we're delighted that the expansion is happening.?

Councillor Cleve Mortelliti was pleased to see the project moving forward.

?I think it's a great thing for the Township, the region and it's certainly a great thing for King City,? Mortelliti said.
A site plan application is anticipated to be submitted in the near future and construction is projected to commence near the end of this year. The final site plan will be brought to Township council for approval together with a site plan development agreement.
The report was received and referred back to staff for a further recommendation report to be presented to Committee of the Whole.