

Township wants condo proposal scaled down

By Mark PavilonsEditorLocal JournalismInitiative Reporter

Despite widespread opposition to a plan for a six-storey condo building in Schomberg, King Township will continue to work with the developer, in hopes of scaling it down. Numerous delegations and councillor opposition almost killed the plan, but councillors opted to refer the matter back to staff. Going against the staff recommendations for approval, council is hoping staff and the developer can work together to come to a solution everyone can live with. Marcor Realty Ltd. has proposed a six-storey residential apartment building at 326 Main Street. The plan is also to repurpose a heritage building on the site for commercial uses. The building would contain 99 units. The proposal has undergone several revisions, since an initial public meeting back in 2022. The current proposal has grown in size and lot coverage. Opposition from residents included concerns about the site's proximity to the Dufferin Marsh; the construction impact on local businesses; tree removal and traffic. The height is the main concern, as residents noted it will be a towering building right in the historic core, something that doesn't fit in at all. One resident called it "the worst plan yet" from the developer. A consultant on behalf of the developer noted this project will meet objectives of King's Official Plan and intensification targets mandated by the Province. The issue of affordability was bounced around yet again. Upper level directives call for an increase in affordable housing across the region, but even apartment projects like this aren't necessarily affordable. It's estimated the lowest units will run upwards of \$600,000. Mayor Steve Pellegrini "who finds the affordability moniker a constant thorn" stressed new builds are simply not affordable, but may be "attainable." Councillor Mary Asselstine was another opponent, pointing to the building's height, lack of parking, increase in traffic as major impacts. The building, perched on the hill, will definitely "hurt the streetscape." Councillor Jennifer Anstey joined her colleague in opposition, noting the building may well meet planning standards, but it "does not meet the standards of the community." She said should the matter go to the Ontario Land Tribunal, she's "okay with that. Some things are worth fighting for." Typically, when council goes against planning recommendations, an appeal to the OLT is often the route taken by proponents. Councillor David Boyd pointed out OLT cases are costly for all parties involved. He suggested the matter be referred so there can be a willingness to create something better. Mayor Pellegrini pointed out another major stumbling block is water/sewer allocation. There's only so much pipe capacity and this building would consume most of it, leaving very little for any future development in the area. The project, as presented, is a "recipe for disaster," he said. He also wants to see some collaboration with the developer and a scaled-down version as a result. Staff pointed that the Schomberg Village Core consists predominately of small lots with commercial and residential buildings being predominantly 2-storey which line Main Street. Some re-development on Main Street has recently occurred, including at 209 and 215 Main Street where residential units have been added and commercial space has been refurbished and expanded. The new Provincial Planning Statement (PPS 2024) provides municipalities with the tools and flexibility required to focus on building more homes. Settlement areas are to be the focus for growth and where intensification and redevelopment are supported to achieve complete communities, including a range and mix of housing options. The PPS continues to identify the need to establish minimum targets for intensification and redevelopment within built-up areas based on local conditions. This proposal is in conformity with the Provincial Planning Statement (2024) and the Greenbelt Plan (2017). The Regional Official Plan (ROP) notes that intensification is to occur in strategic locations within built-up areas which benefit from efficiencies in infrastructure and transit. The subject Application is consistent with the policy direction of the Plan. While intensification of the Village Core Area is supported by the Official Plan, it must demonstrate compatibility with the small-scale village character. The Official Plan includes provisions for building heights that permit up to 6-storeys provided that certain compatibility criteria are met including visual and shadowing impacts, building tiering, angular plane, step backs and buffering. Furthermore, developments are not to exceed a floor space index of 2.5 to ensure that density and scale remain suitable for the Village Core. The subject application proposes a form of residential intensification contemplated by the Village Core Area policies. The proposed development would consist of a 6-storey apartment building attached to the heritage dwelling that would be re-purposed for commercial uses which together has a total floor space index of 1.22 which means that the total building floor area proposed compared to the total area of the lot equals a ratio of 1.22. The policies of the Official Plan also recognize that additional density (height, coverage, FSI) can be considered when contemplating redevelopment, provided that the Application includes the conservation of a heritage building, as has been proposed by the application. The Township's peer-review architect has conducted a detailed review in respect to site design and interface with

neighbouring properties, site access and circulation, building massing and transitions, visual impact and shadowing and is supportive of the proposed development. The subject property is designated as Village Core with an overlay identifying a Special Policy Area which acknowledges the flood susceptibility of the main central area of the Village being in proximity to the Schomberg River and tributaries. The province has provided a site-specific exemption in the case of Schomberg for the purposes of ensuring that the viability of the commercial core continues and that development continue to be considered. Only certain uses including institutional, emergency services and infrastructure are prohibited from locating in the Special Policy Area. The proposed development is centred on lands that fall outside of the floodplain whereas the driveway access to Main Street, the front yard and perimeter yards are located within the flood plain area. The proposed development complies with the Official Plan policies in this regard. The application is asking for bylaw amendments to increase the front yard setback; reduce the rear setback; increase the maximum height; reduce parking requirements, and more. Planning staff note there are still many details to work out, and council must be satisfied regarding the number of parking spots provided. The focus on one-bedroom units in the building does provide an amount of affordability, staff noted. There are concerns with building mass and height. The building massing and transition from abutting lots is being addressed by tiering back the building and introducing step-backs on several levels to push the building massing away from neighbouring lots. Step backs are when a building wall stops in height and the continuation of the building above occurs at a distance further away from the wall located below. An angular plane is an urban planning tool for evaluating building height and massing from lot lines using a 45-degree inclined plane over the subject lot. The extent of the step-backs works in conjunction with a 45-degree angular plane that is used to transition building height and massing away from neighbouring properties and provide improved access to sunlight. The Application has attempted to address height and density concerns through site location and layout where the building would be setback from the edge of Main Street in a location outside the floodplain. The existing dwelling is setback 38 metres from the Street. The existing vegetation and setbacks contribute to the unique Main Street character found in this section of the core. The positioning of the new building behind the heritage dwelling, staff said, would also soften the view and mitigate the view of the proposed building. The impacts of building massing and height on the community and adjacent lands has been further assessed through the submission of a Visual Impact Study. A shadow study was submitted with the application and reviewed by the Township's Architectural peer review consultant to determine if the proposed development would present significant shadow impacts on the public street, adjacent residential lots and the Dufferin Marsh. The review concluded that the significant setback of the building from Main Street assists in mitigating shadowing impacts relative to surrounding properties. The review took into consideration the timing and length of sunlight that adjacent properties and the Dufferin Marsh would continue to receive and found it to be acceptable. The access to Main Street would be required to be improved and widened to accommodate traffic ingress and egress, including garbage trucks, delivery trucks and fire vehicles. The requirement to provide safe movements would require that sight lines be maintained, resulting in the loss of between 3 and 7 on-street parking spaces. A connection to the public sidewalk is planned using a 2.1-metre-wide walkway that would connect pedestrians to a crosswalk over the drive aisle at a location between the heritage building and the main entrance to the apartment building. A pedestrian mid-block crossing of Main Street has been considered. The review of the application has included extensive analysis on the matter of parking. The development is constructed on a site where environmental buffers further limit the development area available to provide parking. Furthermore, the water table is high and therefore limits the number of underground parking levels that can be accommodated and feasible. As a result, the amount of on-site parking provided is deficient by some 30 spaces. The Township's consulting engineer has advised that the existing water network would have sufficient pressure to accommodate the maximum required fire flows from the proposed development without requiring any upgrades to the system. Further, a review of the Township's Wastewater Master Plan Model indicates that the reserve capacity in the downstream sewer pipes is sufficient to accommodate the proposed additional design flows from the proposed development.