

Mid-rise in Vaughan - Compatibility Issue

NRU

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By Edward LaRusic

A proposed seven-storey building on a uniquely shaped property in Vaughan is drawing ire from both the community and local councillors who argue the building is not compatible with the surrounding neighbourhood.

The site is configured in the shape of a flag with its roughly rectangular-shaped lot connected to Islington Avenue by a narrow piece of land (akin to a flag pole). A portion of the site to the west is a woodlot that would be retained.

Lanada Investments Limited is seeking zoning by-law and official plan amendments to permit 95 residential units and 109 parking spaces.

Lanada planner Alan Young (Weston Consulting) told NRU that the site is a good location for a seven-storey building. Islington Avenue is recognized as an intensification area in the 2010 Vaughan official plan and Islington Avenue is served by a York Region Transit bus route. The proposal, he said, has setbacks and buffers that ensure the building is compatible with its surroundings.

"The north lot line is the most sensitive lot line in that it's abutting rear lot lines of stable residential. Those happen to be very deep lots," said Young.

"What [Lanada is] proposing there to address that is the 45-degree [angular] plane, which is the city's own device for achieving compatibility next to stable residential areas and which is used in a variety of locations across the GTA."

The woodlot to the west would help buffer the building from houses fronting on Waymar Heights Boulevard. While having some impact on existing homes on Islington Avenue, Young noted that Islington is expected to redevelop in a manner similar to the five-storey boutique condominium recently constructed by Fernbrook Homes to the south-east of the Lanada site.

The official plan allows for 3.5-storey townhouses on the rectangular portion of the site, the result of a 2002 settlement between Lanada and the city that was approved by the Ontario Municipal Board. However, townhomes were never built. Properties along Islington Avenue, under the Woodbridge Centre Secondary Plan, are allowed to be up-to-five storeys tall. The secondary plan, along with the Vaughan's 2010 official plan, is currently under appeal at the board. Lanada is one of the appellants.

The mood from the crowd at the February 3 public meeting concerning the Lanada proposal was best summed up by deputy mayor and committee chair Michael Di Biase. After 40 minutes of public deputations in opposition to the proposal, Di Biase asked Young whether the developer wanted to revert to the OMB approved 3.5-storey townhouses on its site at 8334 Islington Avenue.

"Tell us you want to go back to the old plan now." Residents, organized against the application, lambasted everything from its compatibility and design to the impacts of condominium living on mental health and the noise impacts on the heart rate of children.

Village of Woodbridge Ratepayers' Association president Maria Verna told the committee of the whole that residents would prefer the townhouse scheme approved by the OMB. She noted that the association has collected 120 petitions from residents in opposition to Lanada's seven-storey proposal.

"This seven-storey proposed building with its excessive height and massive volume is overwhelming and will overpower what is currently a vibrant area with an established natural habitat in a quaint community. We are overly concerned that the approval of this application will continue to set an unfortunate precedent or template for future development in the village area," said Verna.

A positive traffic report by Cole Engineering submitted as part of the proposal will be reviewed by staff. Young told NRU that the 45-degree angular plane addresses most of the privacy issues raised by residents. The landscaping and buffering will help address other issues at the site plan stage. Lanada is also considering acquiring additional land to widen the driveway into the site.

Residents' concerns were echoed by members of the committee of the whole, who did not support Lanada asking for what Vaughan considers to be high-density development after getting approval for townhouses from the board. Despite Young's contention that a seven-storey building would be compatible with its surroundings, council remained unconvinced.

Ward 1 councillor Marilyn Lafrate said at the meeting that good planning could be achieved through a 3.5-storey building. "This [site] is totally surrounded by residential, single-family homes. This is not just abutting [homes on] one side, this isn't full frontage on a main road, this is a laneway going into the middle of people's backyards."

Mayor Maurizio Bevilacqua asked Lanada to continue to work with the community to see if a compromise could be found.

"I'm a very strong proponent of intensification, but it's got to be in the right place... Reconsider what you're offering to the community, go back and do some soul searching, and see if you can come up with a middle ground and make this work."