

News / GTA

Is Vaughan's heritage losing out to development?

Heritage village of Maple facing half a dozen development proposals residents fear will change the neighbourhood.



AARON HARRIS / TORONTO STAR

Jana and Bill Manolakos shown near St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Vaughan in October 2015. Residents who live in Maple are concerned the townhomes proposed for the area will take away the heritage feel of the community.

By: Noor Javed News reporter, Published on Fri Oct 30 2015

The heart of the “village of Maple” is easy to miss.

To most, Keele St. near Major Mackenzie Dr., is another busy intersection in Vaughan, where suburban commuters battle the weekday gridlock to make it to work and back home on time.

But for long-time resident Jana Manolakos, the intersection is the gateway to the Maple of the past with its distinctive homes, classical buildings and churches. Maple was believed to have been established in the 19th century — long before it joined with neighbouring communities of Thornhill, Kleinburg and Woodbridge to create the city now known as Vaughan.

“I grew up in Maple when it was just a few thousand people,” said Manolakos. “Some families have been here for decades. There is a real sense of community here,” she said. But as Vaughan faces development pressures, it seems preserving history is getting harder to do. Across York Region, residents and politicians are grappling with how to balance protecting established heritage areas from the pressure of infill development — while ensuring they live up to Places to Grow, the provincial policy for smart growth without sprawl.

Over the past few years, Manolakos started noticing a number of “For Sale” signs along the street in front of homes on large lots. As the neighbours moved out, developers moved in. At first, Manolakos and her husband William were unperturbed until they realized the developers planned to build dozens of townhomes where a single home once stood.

“It was very incremental and happened slowly,” said Manolakos. “But it’s concerning, because if all these homes are built, it will fundamentally change the feel and nature of this community,” she said. “We understand there is a need for development, but we want it done in the right way.”

At least 10 properties have been sold in recent years, and dozen development applications are already in the works over the two kilometre stretch, says the local councillor Marilyn Iafrate.



AARON HARRIS

Bill Manolakos says that developers are looking to maximize land use. Recent findings found that development proposals for townhomes in Maple were not compliant with the city's own official plan, or the Maple Heritage District Conservation Plan.

The sheer number of the development applications for Maple's heritage district led Vaughan city council to pass an interim bylaw in 2014, which froze development on the street for a year. It also gave the city time to do a study that would offer guidelines on how to "protect established neighborhoods" and offer suggestions to ensure that any development would be compatible with the area.

The city hired a consultant and spent \$50,000 to help with the review. Initial findings determined that the development proposals for townhomes in Maple were not compliant with the city's own official plan, or the Maple Heritage District Conservation Plan, which was developed by the city in 2007.

"Each proposal represents significant intensification that does not respect and reinforce the village character of Maple described in the MHCDP or the character of the larger

existing neighbourhoods on either side of Keele St.,” the report found, adding that the proposals were “four to 10 times denser than the oldest neighbourhoods in the area.” It echoed the Manolakos’ concerns: “Most of the proposals represent significant intensification that would result in a significant physical change to the community,” the report said.

But when staff came back to ask for an extension to finish the report over the summer, Ward 2 councillor Tony Carella put forward a motion (which was seconded by Ward 3 councillor Rosanna DeFrancesca) to kill both the bylaw and the study, which was months away from completion.

The residents of Maple were outraged. Hundreds of people showed up at a meeting in September on two of the proposed developments in the area — to express their frustrations with the city and Carella. Carella did not respond to a request for comment. The Manolakos’ were front and centre at the meeting.

“What developers are trying to do is maximize land use, not build to the standards of the community they are in,” said William, who was one of the residents who helped develop the conservation plan years ago.

Iafrate says she won’t let the matter go. She re-introduced a motion last week to have staff continue and accelerate the study on Keele St.

Council merged it with another motion, introduced by councillor DeFrancesca for a city-wide study to start in 2016 to guide new development in established areas — one nearly identical to what staff had been working on before council quashed it in the summer. Iafrate says while staff will complete the report in early 2016, she’s concerned about what will happen in the interim, as there is no way to stop or guide the development proposals pouring in.

“By the time this city-wide review even starts, it will be too late for Maple,” she said. “This was a chance for us to stand up and say we are going to develop our communities the way our residents expect them to be developed. Sadly, that didn’t happen.”