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NEWS

Hazelview highrise proposal for Thornhill Square sparks renewed calls for moratorium on development

'Collective impact of Hazelview, Shouldice Hospital lands, Tridel condos and Langstaff Gateway TOCs will strangle our neighbourhood'

By **Heidi Riedner** Thornhill Liberal

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The latest high-rise project proposed for Thornhill has some local residents renewing calls for a moratorium on any further developments until an updated secondary plan for the area is in place.

Hazelview Development Inc. has proposed a redevelopment of the Thornhill Square Shopping Centre site at Bayview Avenue and John Street that would bring four buildings between seven and 19 storeys to accommodate 615 residential units, as well as commercial and retail space.

A revised application retains the current Food Basics and Shoppers Drug Mart, albeit at reduced square footage, and bumps up parkland allocation to a 1.7-acre parcel adjacent to the Santorini's Restaurant operating out of the heritage John Welsh House.

The proposal "misses the mark", however, for close to two dozen residents and representatives from three community associations in the Thornhill Centre area of Markham, who raised their concerns during a statutory public meeting March 22.

Reduced floorplans for the current Food Basics and Shoppers Drug Mart, tower height, traffic, parking and potential flooding were among some of the issues specific to the project noted by residents, who conceded the area is in need of revitalization.

But the overriding problem identified is the impact Hazelview will have on the community when taken in conjunction with other projects in the queue, including the TOCs at Langstaff Gateway.

"The impact of a great number of new residents must be considered in that context," said Eric Lakien, who lives in one of the 947 units of the Landmark of Thornhill Condominiums located immediately north of the subject property.

Between the Hazelview proposal, the Shouldice Hospital lands application and the approved Tridel condominium development, ten to 12 towers containing between 5,000 and 7000 people will be concentrated within a one-block radius of each other at Green Lane and Bayview, said 40-year resident Brian Korson.

"When you add in the collective massive impact of the Langstaff Gateway TOCs and traffic from its 100,000+ population and spill over onto Bayview Avenue South, that will strangle our neighbourhood," he said.

"Imagine the visual eyesore of a concrete and steel mountain of up to 15 concrete steel glass towers, including Landmark, in a one-block radius, blocking our sky and scenery and creating a major negative quality of life for not only existing community residents, but also the new residents."

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Korson is among many who criticized what they consider a piecemeal method of dealing with development applications in isolation of other projects that don't consider the collective impacts on neighborhood services, infrastructure and traffic.

All those making deputations called for a halt to any future development until a cohesive plan for the area is put in place involving all stakeholders.

“A comprehensive plan needs to be implemented so that applications are considered in a holistic fashion in order to create a vibrant, livable Thornhill town-centered community for existing and future residents,” former councillor Valerie Burke said. “These applications are coming in a piecemeal fashion and it's a big concern.”

Last year, a petition signed by 1,700 residents asked the city to hold all developments until a new comprehensive secondary plan is established, which addresses all current and future developments, together with an updated transportation plan.

Mayor Frank Scarpitti proposed a committee working group that would include representatives from the three resident groups – Landmark, Aileen-Willowbrook and Thornhill Ward 1 – to address some of the issues raised regarding the Hazelview proposal.

He further assured residents staff and council are working to deal with issues related to the TOC developments to the north.

Regional Council. Jack Heath said an interim control bylaw, which would stop everything for one year, would be the best route moving forward.

“I don't think a committee, which has no standing under the Planning Act, will have any major effect,” he said. “I think we need to stop this whole process and look at the combination of the effect on Thornhill Centre and only an interim control bylaw can affect that and do that.”

STORY BEHIND THE STORY: Reporter Heidi Riedner looked into how developments slated for Thornhill and the Langstaff Gateway TOCs are driving a move to halt further development until an updated secondary plan is put in place for the area.
