

Markhamgate Summit

Residents' Concerns regarding the Proposed Development

A Presentation to the Markhamgate Summit Working Group,
at the Group's Second Meeting, on June 18, 2008.

Scope of Presentation

This presentation is on behalf of members of the Markhamgate Summit Working Group, representing residents of the local community, as listed at the end of the presentation.

It is to draw the Group's attention to the priorities of the local residents and a number of issues which concern them.

Some of the 'issues' are simply points for study and discussion. In some cases, the residents have serious objections to the redevelopment, as currently proposed. These are briefly outlined, so the Applicant can respond to them. We will listen with an open mind. Lacking other solutions, we do believe the development proposal should be modified to alleviate the objections. However, we stress that this presentation is designed to offer a structure for discussion. Specifically, it is not a marshalling of the arguments against the redevelopment proposal.

The issues have been put into a broad hierarchical order. We believe this should structure our discussion. There is no value in getting bogged down in design details, until we have reached at least some level of consensus on the higher order issues.

Residents' Priorities

The residents' priorities are fairly self-evident.

Above all, we do not wish the development to have an adverse impact on the local community, either by reducing the quality of life or by negatively impacting real estate values. On the contrary, we obviously would like to see a development that local residents will view as an asset.

We recognize the Applicant's interests are different from ours. We will not be oblivious to those interests and will seek a mutually beneficial redevelopment scheme.

Markham Intensification

- **The most fundamental issue is the desirability of rezoning the site for residential use.**

The site was not a study area for intensification prior to the Applicant's proposal. We suggest that there were good reasons for this. It is a relatively small area surrounded by low-density, single-family dwellings. High-density housing is not compatible with the surrounding community.

Other currently-undeveloped sites in Markham had previously been identified for possible high-density development. It is much easier to plan a whole community, if the incorporation of high-density housing is a known objective from the outset, as against retrofitting high-density into an existing community.

Size of Residential Community

- **What is an appropriate number of residences and a target population for the site?**

This is second in the hierarchy of questions to be addressed if, and only if, residential use is deemed appropriate.

The local community believes the proposed number of units is drastically higher than the infrastructure can support.

Traffic: By far the most obvious concern is the fact the local road system does not adequately support the current level of traffic, let alone the increase that would inevitably be generated by more residential use. It is impossible for us to support any significant residential use without a comprehensive traffic study. We would appreciate having the opportunity of commenting on the specifications as to how the study is to be conducted, prior to the study's implementation.

Other Infrastructure: Other issues include, but may not be limited to, availability of schools, water services and sewers; and the use of green space.

Type of Residential Housing

- **What type of Housing is desirable for this Site?**

Again, if and only if, residential use is deemed appropriate, there is a need to consider the character of the residential units. The character should be determined in conjunction with a decision on the total number of units.

- We believe that the proposed development contains buildings that are an assault on the local community. They are substantially too high, and totally out of character with the surroundings. The proposed redevelopment does not meet the requirements of the Town of Markham's Official Plan [Section 2.13.1], which requires the type, size, and scale of the proposed redevelopment to be compatible with adjacent development.
- Likewise, the number of buildings is significantly too high, and again out of character.
- It is difficult from the description provided by the Applicant to ascertain the quality of the units. However, the proposed average unit size is small. The location next to a highway, rather than a ravine or green space, suggests that the target market is relatively low income. The selling prices of the units are likely to be substantially lower than the prices of existing homes in the local community. This raises concerns about depressing existing real-estate values.

Design of the Mall

- **What type of Mall is suitable for the Site?**

Perhaps an obvious initial point: we all agree the current run-down mall needs redevelopment. We embrace that idea. The question is what form should that redevelopment take?

We would like to discuss the **Life Style Mall** concept. We have seen too little evidence that an outside mall will work in our climate. The Applicant's pictures of happy people, strolling in short-sleeves, between vibrant green trees, have done more to raise skepticism than provide reassurance.

The photos and description of Life Style Malls in the USA have been of high-end shops, apparently set in fairly affluent single-family communities. The photos do not show any high-rise buildings at, or adjacent to, these malls. This raises the question: is the Applicant planning on replicating this kind of high-end environment, or has the Applicant used 'Life Style' as a misnomer for a basic outdoor mall?

The mall closest to our community that features high-end shopping, space to stroll in comfort year-round, and pleasant places to have coffee with friends, is 'Bayview Village'. The success of this mall is directly linked to the fact that it is enclosed.

Despite the shortcomings of the existing mall, at Steeles and Don Mills, the removal of the existing indoor public space would be a loss to the community.

Also, a reduction in the amount of retail floor space, and/or space for professional services, would be a loss in local amenities. We believe that the provision of residential housing (if any) should not be so extensive as to necessitate the reduction in size of these amenities.

Design Issues for the Site

These items are low on the hierarchy. If we agree on the fundamentals, these other issues are likely to fall into place.

- **Residential Parking**

Inadequate parking in the development for residents and their guests will not stop people owning cars; it will force them to park in space intended for shoppers and/or on local streets.

- **Pedestrian and Internal Traffic Flow**

There appears to be a need for rationalization of traffic flow for the site under redevelopment and the existing gas station. Control of on-street parking within the mall is also likely to be a problem.

There is a concern regarding the ease and safety of access from the proposed parking structure to the retail services.

There are multiple places where pedestrians have to cross internal roads. This will be hazardous and deeply frustrating to both pedestrians and drivers. Entrance and exit from parking under the residential buildings will be extremely slow during peak periods.

Conclusion

We have proposed a constructive approach to seeking consensus on the type of redevelopment that would meet the needs of the Applicant, and be acceptable to the Town of Markham and residents of German Mills.

We hope the Working Group will consider:

- Should the site be rezoned for residential use?
- If residential use is appropriate, what is an appropriate number of residences?
- What type of housing is appropriate for this site?
- What type of Mall is suitable for the site?

We hope the Working Group will reach consensus on the above questions or, at least, a substantial narrowing of the gap between the Applicant's current proposal and the residents' vision for the site.

We believe that we need a measure of consensus on these fundamental issues, before it will be productive to talk about specific redevelopment proposals.

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