

Richmond Hill Liberal

OMB rolls Richmond Hill projects into townwide appeal

Thu Nov 22 2012

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Section: News

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Residents with something to say about a controversial triple highrise proposal at Yonge and Major Mackenzie will get their chance when Richmond Hill's new official plan goes before the Ontario Municipal Board - if the town and Baif Developments don't settle through mediation first. At an OMB pre-hearing Monday, about a dozen concerned residents were told they'd have their say about proposed development near the central library in upcoming hearings focused on the townwide official plan. At the same time, board chairperson Jason Chee-Hing agreed to grant a mediation assessment to see if the parties in the dispute - the Town of Richmond Hill, Baif and the Region of York - can come to an agreement outside of the provincial appeals system. Baif has two appeals underway before the OMB, one dealing with two blocks it owns near Yonge and Major Mackenzie, and another with the town's new official plan. Baif solicitor Roslyn Houser asked the chairperson to consolidate them because they are closely linked. Monday's pre-hearing was held to resolve a dispute over key lands just south of Yonge and Major Mackenzie. They are the last two remaining parcels in Baif's long-term development, stretching from Bathurst to Yonge, known as the Don Head subdivision. Ms Houser told the board her client has proposed two projects for those two land parcels. One mixed-used development would fill the nine-acre block on Yonge Street, with about 1,500 residential units in three towers of 19, 28

and 31 storeys, plus 57,000 square feet of commercial floor area. Two private roads would break the land into three parcels. Land west of the library, about four acres fronting on Major Mackenzie, would hold mid-sized structures of seven and nine storeys with a central courtyard and 421 residential units. The Yonge Street towers would be set back from the road with landscaping to allow "historic vistas" of church steeples to the north, she said. "There are quite significant public facilities surrounding these blocks. It's a very, very important block for the town." The location was strategic, Baif's lawyer said. It's the geographic centre of town, just south of historic downtown and connected to significant roads: Yonge Street which is a regional thoroughfare with planned rapidway transit, and Major Mackenzie, a regional arterial road with rapid transit planned. But the town has refused Baif's application because it doesn't align with its new official plan. Barnett Kussner, the town's town legal representative at the pre-hearing, said the official plan calls for one regional centre, at Yonge and Hwy. 7, (served by a planned subway and open to buildings up to 40 storeys), two key development areas at Yonge and 16th Avenue and Yonge and Bernard, and the intersection of Yonge and Major Mackenzie falling third on that density hierarchy, with nine to 15 storeys permitted. That growth hierarchy is the culmination of a lengthy process of public consultation and engagement, he said. Mr.

Kussner said the town intends to defend and uphold its official plan at the OMB, but agreed with Baif's request for mediation and consolidation. Town planner Ana Bassios said in an interview later that the consolidation is a way to avoid repetition and make the OMB hearing process more efficient. Karen Kotzen, OMB spokesperson, said the board will review the issue to see if it should go to mediation. If the board decides there's a reasonable chance for success, the decision would be posted on the website and the process will be private, between the three parties. Several residents who came to the Monday hearing added their names to the list of participants wishing to speak against the Baif proposal at the upcoming hearings.

They voiced concerns about increased traffic and shadowing of their nearby homes, and expressed anger at the developers' attempt to bypass the town's official plan. "It's very poor that a developer, knowing the wishes of the town, would put together a development like this. It may be nice somewhere else, but certainly the area they have chosen is inappropriate," said Margaret Roscoe. "It creates a dissonance of design and tone with local surroundings and the town in general," said Wendy Nurgitz. "We are resisting this because to us it does not make sense, although for the developers it will make a lot of dollars. Mr. Chee-Hing, who said he was "well aware" of the area as a longtime resident of Richmond Hill, said if the issue goes to mediation, a board-appointed adjudicator other than himself will act as neutral third party to try to bring the sides together. There will still be opportunity for others who wish to speak on the Yonge and Major Mackenzie projects, he said, advising those interested

to attend the next pre-hearing set for Dec. 7.

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