

## AT ISSUE: Highland Creek Village must make decision on future

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Many people don't want it to happen, but if it doesn't, Highland Creek Village will slowly die.

That, finally, is how some residents and business owners have started talking about redevelopment in their small commercial centre, along Kingston Road at Scarborough's eastern edge.

There are five applications to build in the historic village. Scarborough Community Council approved the first of them, a three-storey mixed-use building, last week, but not before hearing from a homeowner who opposed the project's "excessive density."

"Clearly this building is too big for the lot," said Paul Meleta, adding its "insufficient" underground parking - a space for each of the 39 condominiums, plus eight for visitors and six for ground-floor businesses - will "aggravate an existing situation" in the village.

The idea people can live, work and shop in the area and therefore drive less is a myth, argued Meleta, a frequent village visitor who said he lives five blocks away.

"We're still in suburbia and we're a motoring society."

A year ago, it seemed no one would publicly support a developer's plan for 363 Old Kingston Road, vacant land at the corner of Morrish Road partly used for parking at village businesses.

The community had defeated a 2007 application for the same property, one seeking to build a four-storey retirement home with 91 units. After an Ontario Municipal Board approval, the city challenged the decision in Divisional Court and won.

A public meeting on the new three-storey plan last November drew 110 people, and "the prevailing sentiment expressed by those in attendance was that of opposition to the proposal," a report by city planners says.

Half or perhaps as many as two-thirds of residents in the room raised their hands to indicate their opposition, the report adds.

When supporters were asked to raise their hands, no one did.

Written comments weren't much different. Only two were supportive of the plan, the rest citing concerns about parking, density, precedent and preserving the community's "heritage nature."

Last week, however, local merchants came forward to say approving the building - requiring zoning and Official Plan changes to allow residences in the village - is a first step in saving a commercial area that has stagnated.

"We need the traffic in there. This condo will do a lot of good," said Billy Yarn, a long-time resident who recently opened a business, La Lune Spa, on Old Kingston. "This village is dying and we need some changes."



**AT ISSUE: Highland Creek Village must make decision on future.** Development proposals could impact the future of the Highland Creek Village area on Old Kingston Road in east Scarborough. *Staff photo/NICK PERRY*

Greg Robb, who owns Sugarbuds Village Bakery and cafe across the street from the empty lot, said he grew up in Highland Creek and he and his wife Sabrina Singh have made a serious investment in the community.

But Robb said their business has had a tough year and he fears things could slide further. If the village had some residences, he added, he wouldn't mind competition from another cafe or restaurant, particularly one open later than his own.

There's no reason the village, a beautiful area with lots of trees, "cannot be like Unionville," Robb said, referring to former main street in Markham which found new life as a spot for shopping and restaurants.

Some participants in the Highland Creek Village Study, prompted in January by the development applications and expected to be finished early in 2012, shared similar views that development in their village was inevitable or even necessary.

Caesar Caruana said the proposal would produce "awesome building" in the village's heart. Developers who communicated a little more, would get more support for their plans, he suggested.

"Because of the unknown, there is a lot of fear."

In a letter about the Old Kingston proposal to local councillor Ron Moeser last month, Clancy Delbarre had criticized "the dominance of its bulk" amongst one and two-storey neighbours, adding, "There are three others (proposed) within a few hundred metres of this one and all we can hope for is that they respect the 'village' atmosphere."

But Delbarre also seemed last week to accept the proposed building, though he urged councillors to spend the builder's contribution to city parks directly on some playground equipment in the village. New families moving in will need it, he said.

Scarborough councillors, meanwhile, were united in support of managed redevelopment, with Norm Kelly of Scarborough-Agincourt saying he thought apartment buildings, with units stepped back, would be appropriate for the "core" of the area.

There are thousands of students "just up the road" at the University of Toronto Scarborough on Military Trail that should be interested in Highland Creek Village too, he said.

Paul Ainslie said he grew up nearby and, a history buff, had read descriptions of life in the village 100 years ago. But around 10 years ago, he started noticing businesses leaving. The grocery store left, and the library moved, he recalled.

Today, Ainslie said, there's still a lot of potential in the village area.

Moeser said the biggest challenge facing "a very unique little area" is parking and added the complex cluster of roads forming the village "is a nightmare, traffic-wise."

The planning study he initiated is the third done on the area and there's a passion in the community for doing something, he said.

If the different landowners in the village can agree on a vision for redevelopment, Moeser added, "I think it can be done, and it can be done uniquely."

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