

From: Mark Newton
Sent: Monday, February 24, 2025 12:42 PM
To: Mayor & Councillors <mayorandcouncillors@markham.ca>
Cc: Clerks Public
Subject: Council Meeting February 25, 2025

Dear Honourable Mayor and Council Members,

Re: AGENDA ITEM 6.4
OFFICIAL PLAN AND ZONING BY-LAW AMENDMENT APPLICATIONS TO
PERMIT THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW BAHAI NATIONAL CENTRE AND
CANADIAN NATIONAL TEMPLE AT 7200 AND 7290 LESLIE STREET (WARD
1)
FILE PLAN 22 262723

I request City Council to vote against the above-captioned applications, or to defer a decision, and to refer the applications back to City staff. There are aspects of the development proposal that are completely out-of-line with the Official Plan and Zoning By-laws. Reasonable modifications should be made, as suggested below.

Over the past couple of years, since first becoming aware of the applicant's development proposal, community members in the surrounding neighbourhoods and beyond have repeatedly voiced their significant concerns about the proposed development. The community appreciates that the earlier proposal for an emergency access route through the meadow was not approved by the City. However, most other concerns have not been addressed in any meaningful way either by the applicant or by the City.

The following continue to be major concerns of the community:

- The construction of a large lodging facility.
- The redesignation of Greenway as Residential Low-Rise and elimination of hundreds of mature trees.
- The construction of a combined temple complex and national administration centre at the end of a cul-de-sac.
- The construction of a temple building with a height that is three times that permitted under Zoning By-laws.

The above concerns (and others) have been set out in writing by residents, in correspondence with the applicant and with City staff and in written and oral

submissions to the Development Services Committee, the Thornhill Subcommittee and to Councillor Irish at a Community Meeting.

The community has a legitimate expectation that the City will make reasonable accommodations concerning proposed developments. This has been the practice of the City. However, in the case of these development applications, neither the applicant nor the City has been prepared to make reasonable accommodations regarding the above concerns.

Three Ratepayer Associations, namely, the German Mills South Ratepayers' Association, the Settlers Park Residents Association and the Bayview Fairways Ratepayers Association, wrote a lengthy letter dated June 5, 2024 to City staff and copied the Mayor and all City councillors, requesting clarification regarding the above and other concerns (copy attached).

That letter was not answered by City staff, notwithstanding follow-up requests. The letter was not even acknowledged. Meeting requests by the presidents of the three Associations were not responded to.

Regarding the above four concerns, the City's Recommendation Report dated February 11, 2025 makes only a passing reference to the lodging facilities. It does not mention the size of the lodging facilities, namely, 76 rooms, according to the last presentation by the applicant. The Report avoids even commenting on either the appropriateness of such a lodging facility running the length of a residential street, or on there being only a 4.5 metre setback where there should be a setback of at least 15 metres according to the Zoning By-laws. (The Applicant had initially proposed a 5-metre setback, later revised it to 4 metres and then 4.5 metres.)

The Report concludes without evidentiary or ecological support that the redesignation of Greenway to residential low-rise and the elimination of hundreds of mature trees will result in a "net overall ecological gain". It is simply inconceivable that the removal of hundreds of mature trees and their replacement by saplings will result in an ecological gain. The removal of such a large number of mature trees will degrade the local environment for generations. The Report should refer to measurable criteria and should specify exactly what the positive impact will be and the timeline. The applicant and the City should be held accountable based upon measurable criteria and timeline validation.

The Report referred to the City having retained the services of an "independent third-party reviewer to undertake a Peer Review of the Applications from an environmental perspective". However, as stated in the Public Meeting, the peer reviewer was recommended by the applicant's planner and retained by the City. It is simply not acceptable to retain a peer reviewer with such a strong apprehension of bias or to accept

or rely upon such person's report. The members of the community who attended the Public Meeting were appalled by the conflict of interest and bias.

Furthermore, the Report does not address how an 82' (25 metre) high temple conforms to a residential low-rise designation. The Zoning By-laws would limit the height of the temple to the average height of homes on Waterloo Court and in the Bayview Fairways communities, namely, 25 feet (7.6 metres). The Report states that the applicant reduced the proposed temple height from 30 metres to 25 metres. However, both heights are wildly inappropriate and obviously non-compliant with the Zoning By-laws. The Report also states that the height of 25 metres will be "generally in line with the heights of surrounding vegetation". Firstly, this is not the standard to be applied under the Zoning By-laws. Secondly, the statement is not accurate, once the "surrounding vegetation" (mature trees) is clear-cut to make room for the temple.

The Report side-steps the issue of the location of the proposed development at the end of a cul-de-sac. The following statement in the Report avoids the issue: "Staff note that the main access for the Proposed Development from Leslie Street will not require additional vehicular access for the Proposed Development through other local roads." The fact is, there will be only one access and there will not and cannot be a flow-through of traffic. This issue will only be exacerbated in the future, as the applicant clearly anticipates a large number of visitors. Otherwise, there would not be a need for two visitor centres, 76 lodging rooms, a large national administration centre, a huge temple building, above and below-ground parking and overflow parking.

The community has gone to a considerable effort to communicate their legitimate and reasonable concerns to the City and to the applicant. Reasonable accommodations should be made to take into account the concerns of the overwhelming majority of the population in the surrounding neighbourhoods. Council should vote against the development applications and request the applicant to modify its proposals to more closely align with the Official Plan and Zoning By-laws.

Respectfully,

Mark Newton