

Development Services Public Meeting Minutes

Meeting Number: 10
May 28, 2024, 7:00 PM - 9:00 PM
Live streamed

Roll Call	Deputy Mayor Michael Chan Regional Councillor Jim Jones Regional Councillor Joe Li Councillor Keith Irish Councillor Ritch Lau	Councillor Reid McAlpine Councillor Karen Rea Councillor Amanda Collucci Councillor Juanita Nathan Councillor Isa Lee
Regrets	Mayor Frank Scarpitti Councillor Alan Ho	Councillor Andrew Keyes Patrick Wong, Senior Planner, Natural Heritage
Staff	Rick Cefaratti, Senior Planner, West District Patrick Wong, Senior Planner, Natural Heritage	Stephen Lue, Senior Manager, Development Erica Alligood, Election and Committee Coordinator Laura Gold, Council/Committee Coordinator

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1. CALL TO ORDER

The Development Services Public Meeting convened at 7:05 PM with Regional Councillor Joe Li in the Chair.

The Committee recessed from 9:07 – 9:17 AM.

2. DISCLOSURE OF PECUNIARY INTEREST

There was no disclosure of pecuniary interest.

3. DEPUTATIONS

Deputations were addressed with the respective item.

4. REPORTS

4.1 PUBLIC MEETING INFORMATION REPORT, NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY OF THE BAHÁ'Í'S AT 7015 LESLIE STREET, APPLICATION FOR OFFICIAL PLAN AMENDMENT AND ZONING BY-LAW AMENDMENT TO INCLUDE LANDS, MUNICIPALLY ADDRESSED AS 7015 LESLIE STREET, TO THE AREA OF THE OVERALL PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT OF A NATIONAL CENTRE AT 7200 AND 7290 LESLIE STREET, WHICH WAS SUBJECT TO A PREVIOUS PUBLIC MEETING ON MAY 23, 2023 (WARD 1), FILE NO. PLAN 22 262723 (10.3, 10.5)

The Public Meeting this date was to consider an application submitted by The National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'i of Canada.

The Committee Clerk advised that 954 notices were mailed on May 8, 2024, and a Public Meeting sign was posted on May 6, 2024. There were 20 written submissions received regarding this proposal.

Stephen Lue, Senior Manager, Development, introduced the item.

Rick Cefaratti, Senior Planner, gave a presentation regarding the proposal, the location, surrounding uses and outstanding issues.

John Givens, Malon Given Parsons, introduced the item on behalf of the Applicant, advising that tonight's Statutory Development Services Committee is only to discuss the lands located at 7015 Leslie Street, as the west side of the application was previously discussed at the May 23, 2023, Statutory Development Services Public Meeting at other meetings.

Alyssa Hrynyk, Malone Given Parsons, provided a presentation on the proposal, and explained the rationale for adding 7015 Leslie Street to the application. Ms. Hrynyk noted that responses to the questions from the April 8th Thornhill Sub-Committee have been posted on the Baha'i's website.

The following deputations were made on the proposed development:

Valerie Burke provided a deputation in opposition of the proposed National Baha'i Centre and to the amendment of the City's Official Plan and Zoning By-Law. Ms. Burke expressed the following concerns regarding the proposal: the detrimental impact it would have on the German Mills Meadow; that the proposal would fragment the German Mills ecological corridor such that the net effect would not be beneficial to the community; that the lands will be manicured gardens rather than kept in a natural state; that light pollution will harm insects and wildlife; and that the establishment of the Bahai prior to residents is

irrelevant. Valerie asked how the peer reviewer could be impartial since it was the applicant who recommended her.

Karen McKye spoke in support of the Baha'i application for the following reasons: the place of worship would be a gift to the people of Canada; the place of worship would be open to people of every faith; the place of worship symbolizes the oneness of humanity; and the Baha'i has pledged to work with the community through the community consultation process. Ms. McKye thanked the community for their feedback on the application.

Edith Kangas spoke in opposition to the proposed development expressing, expressing the following concerns: the parking has been reduced from 202 to 110 spaces; By-Law 28-7 requires 435 spots; the Applicant is asking for 100 overflow parking spaces at 7015 Leslie Street; the Toronto Region Conservation Authority has expressed some concern regarding the application; that there is no option for off-site or on street parking; that the emergency vehicles may have difficulty accessing the site; the impact the proposal will have on traffic; that the improvements to Leslie Street do not change the fact that it is a dead end street and that this is the wrong location for the proposal.

Wendy Sun spoke in opposition to the proposed development and rebutted several of the Applicant's open answers to her deputation made at the April 9 Thornhill Subcommittee meeting: the massive scale of the project; the large number of trees that will be lost at a time when we should be protecting our forests; the high number of Bahai holy days (based on Bahai's own website which differ from what the Applicant claimed in its response letter); the traffic study is not realistic; the ownership of responsibility to ensure safety of the building at 7015 Leslie when Leslie Street floods which was not answered in the Applicant's response; and that the project could not be called a "gift to Canada" as claimed by the Applicant when it brings so many issues to this community in Canada, but if it was in a more suitable location it may be more welcome.

Kimberley Seymour spoke in opposition to the proposed Official Plan and Zoning By-Law amendments, expressing the following concern: the Applicant's lack of communication and unwillingness to work with the community; Dr. Martin-Downs peer review should not be considered since the developer asked for this person to do the Peer review, as opposed to the City. The developer has worked with this person in the past and therefore it was not conducted by an independent person. SPRA would like to review her report when complete; the impact the proposal would have on the deer and other animals living in the meadow including species of concern, species at risk and endangered species; that the Toronto Region and Conservation Authority(TRCA) considers the meadow a

significant wildlife corridor; Baha'i should not be allowed to have trails open during bird breeding season as the trails along the fenced at Lot 3 are closed; and that the community does not support parking at 7290 Leslie Street as it is a vital wildlife corridor and hazardous zone, and is not supported by TRCA.

Ingrid Ling spoke in opposition to the proposed Official Plan and Zoning By-law amendments, expressing the following concerns that were noted in the comments from a survey that was conducted on the proposal (note: the survey had 422 responses with 419 saying no, two undecided, and one saying yes to the proposal): the proposal will destroy the meadow that Markham has created; the proposal will destroy a quiet and peaceful community; that the City should be protecting the existing community by saying no to a massive tourist attraction being proposed in a residential community; and there are more suitable locations for the proposal.

Evelin Ellison spoke about the need to understand the indigenous people that lived on these lands thousand of years ago, questioning if an archeological study of the lands has been conducted and if the project provides a net archeological benefit. Ms. Ellison was glad that no new structure was being built on the lands located at 7015 Leslie Street but suggested that the Baha'i consider renovating its existing temple rather than building a new temple.

Mark Newton spoke in opposition to the proposed development reiterating the statement by Councillor Irish at the May 2, 2024, Community Meeting suggesting that the interest of residents should come first. Mr. Newton also suggested that more work needs to be done by the Thornhill Subcommittee. Mr. Newton explained that the survey conducted by the Ratepayer's Association found that the community is overwhelmingly against the project as it would dominate the community by transforming it into a Baha'i Village, and that the residents of Waterloo Court do not want a lodging facility on their street. Mr. Newton spoke about the City's responsibility to defer the project indefinitely due to the proposed changes to provincial legislation that would remove residents' right to appeal the application. Mr. Newton provided the Clerk with copies of two letters, one from the Baha'i National Centre to two Residents Associations, dated May 17, 2024, and the other from the two RAs, in response, dated May 21, 2024.

Bob Watts, Member of the First Nations, and a Member of the Canadian Baha'i Community, spoke in support of the proposed National Baha'i Centre. Mr. Watts advised that diversity is central to the teaching of the Baha'i faith. Mr. Watts noted that he has been working with the Baha'i members on indigenous issues that have been raised pertaining to the project. Mr. Watts explained that they have been discussing bringing Indigenous knowledge and intelligence to the project. Mr. Watts thought the National Baha'i would be a gift to Canada, and a gift of love.

Hajar Gilani spoke of her deep respect to the Baha'i congregation, but expressed deep concern for the impact the development would have on her family. Ms. Gilani compared the numbers of visitors to several Baha'i temples and the number of Baha'i followers in those countries. She also compared the length of time for construction of those temples. Some of her concerns included: the scale of the project and the large size of the temple; the number of tourists that the temple could possibly attract; the impact the proposal will have on traffic; and the years of construction it will take to build and affect it will have on the community.

Melanie Heilbronn spoke in opposition of the development proposal, expressing the following concerns: that it is being proposed on a quiet residential road rather than on an arterial road; the reduction in the parking considering the amount of visitors it is likely to attract; that it will be a tourist attraction; and that it is being proposed in the wrong location.

Gail Lavery provided a deputation in favour of protecting the German Mills Meadow and Natural Habitat and in opposition to the proposed development. Ms. Lavery displayed a video highlighting the natural habitat of the meadow the importance of protecting it from the development proposal.

Jack Heath provided a deputation providing his feedback on the April 9th presentation of the Baha'i application. Mr. Heath advised that some improvements have been made to the proposal, but expressed concern a working group has not been formed to resolve more of the issues. Mr. Heath suggested that the City should initiate a study on converting the greenway into an environmental corridor, and that a new fence should be erected at the Bayview Country Club that would allow wildlife to pass through. Mr. Heath noted that a sidewalk is needed on Leslie Street until the end of the road but suggested that the Lake-to-Lake trail should be taken off Leslie and go under Steeles instead so that cyclists and pedestrians are not competing. Mr. Heath recommended that Markham and York Region approach Toronto regarding this possibility. Mr. Heath suggested that the Development Services Committee insist on the Baha'i transfer the environmentally sensitive lands to the City. Mr. Heath encouraged the Applicant, the City, and the residents to work together to come up with a solution.

Sue Mason provided a deputation expressing concern that the proposed development and other large-scale developments in the area will impact the community, and that meadow that took 50 years to evolve will be harmed. Ms. Mason shared pictures of the wildlife in the meadow, emphasizing the importance of protecting their habitat. Ms. Mason suggested that the City purchase the Baha'i lands to protect the greenspace, which would align with Markham's strategy to acquire greenspace in anticipation of future growth and Markham's Integrated

Leisure Master Plan. Ms. Mason noted that the project is not in the best interest of residents.

Samira Jahanpour, teenager and Baha'i Member, spoke about her excitement that Markham will have a National Baha'i Centre. Ms. Jahanpour spoke of the many youth programs the Baha'i offers to the community. Ms. Jahanpour shared the amazing spiritual experience she had visiting the Baha'i National Centre in Chicago, which is in a similar area to the site in Markham. Ms. Jahanpour advised that she supported the proposal as it would bring a sense of calmness, love and unity to the community.

Harcharan (Harry) Singh, German Mills South Residents Association, spoke in opposition to the rezoning of 7015 Leslie Street. Mr. Singh advised that planners of the past terminated Leslie at Steeles Avenue to avoid disturbing the natural feature. Mr. Singh noted that damaging a small part of the meadow will affect its entire ecosystem. Mr. Singh advocated to Member of Council to deny this application, and to preserve and protect the meadow.

Jeff Minuk spoke about the issue with the problematic zoning of Accessory uses for the new building at 7200 and its connection to the temple at 7290 Leslie. The proposed building at 7200 Leslie does not meet the definition of an accessory to a temple because of the larger square footage than the temple is on another property and the large amount of lodging, offices, and meeting facilities. He also highlighted the signage issue for the development notices for 7200 & 7290, and 7015, which might be an error. He is also concerned with the construction schedule.

Stan Lapidus spoke in opposition to the proposed development, expressing the following concerns: the site is too small and too environmentally sensitive for the proposal; the proposal does not fit into the character of the existing residential community; that the temple will extend above the treetops; that the proposal does not provide any benefit to the existing community; the impact the proposal will have on property values; and the traffic and the noise pollution the proposal will create. Mr. Lapidus spoke of Council's responsibility to represent and safeguard the community, noting the majority of residents are opposed to the proposal. Mr. Lapidus advocated for the status quo – protecting the existing meadow and greenspace for the community. Mr. Lapidus suggested the City hold a referendum to determine if the application should be approved.

Maryam Sabzevari, registered planner, and landscape architect expressed the following concerns regarding the proposed development: that the proposed development will negatively impact Meadow's ecosystem; the loss of as significant

number of mature trees; and the light, noise and air pollution the proposal will cause. Ms. Sabzervari asked the Applicant to be environmentally responsible, noting that this is in alignment with their faith.

Jammal Merrick expressed concern that resident groups were speaking on his behalf, but not representing his views. He felt that they were exaggerating their concerns and speaking of them out of context and spreading fear in the community. Mr. Merrick spoke of his love for the meadow and the green space that it offers but noted that something else be built if the Baha'i proposal is not approved and that only about five percent of the meadow lands are affected. Mr. Merrick noted that Thornhill youth could benefit greatly from the services the Baha'i provides. Mr. Merrick did not see how this development would have a huge impact on the community and felt that the doctor had made the correct conclusions regarding the affect the proposal will have on the meadow. Mr. Merrick hoped that all stakeholders' considerations are taken in place when making a decision on the proposal.

Howard Shore, Past Councillor, City of Markham, spoke about how Council approved the establishment of the German Mills Meadow and Natural Habitat 12 years ago, and how the former landfill become an oasis and one of the three grasslands in the GTA. Mr. Shore urged Members of Council to deny this proposal and honour promises of the past, as approving the proposal would severely threaten the ecosystem of the meadow that took decades to flourish.

Paul Zammit, President, Bayview Fairways Residents Association, sought clarification on why the City purchasing the City purchasing the Baha'i lands is different than the City purchasing the Shouldice lands. Mr. Zammit noted that Council will have to live with their decision on this application for a long time. Mr. Zammit expressed concern that the proposal is being proposed in this location, and that it will affect real-estate values in the area. Mr. Zammit questioned if there would be another public meeting on the project and when Council will make their decision on the application.

Askhan Tabid spoke in opposition to the proposed development, expressing the following concerns: the impact it will have on the meadow/greenspace; the proposal does not conform to the existing zoning laws; and that a tourist attraction that will attract many visitors is being proposed in a quiet neighbourhood. Mr. Tabid asked for Member of Council to represent their constituents and vote against the proposal.

Angel Sze expressed concern that the proposed development will damage the meadow that residents have fought to restore, and that the Applicant would be

permitted to cut down over 600 hundred trees while she has not been denied the right to cut down one tree that is at risk of falling on her house.

Behzad Saison spoke in support of the proposal to build a Baha'i National Centre, explaining the following benefits of the proposal: the centre will be open to people from all wakes of life; the centre will be open to all races, which is reflected in the design of the temple through its nine doors - each representing a race of humanity, and the central dome representing unity of humanity; and the Baha'i is committed to eliminating all forms of prejudice and promoting peace.

Rebecca Yau spoke in opposition to the proposed development, expressing the following concerns: it is not the right location for a National Baha'i Centre; that existing residents would likely would not participate in the Baha'i programing as they already have their own faith; and that her safety may be infringed upon as strangers will frequently be coming into their community.

Naysan Hariri spoke in support of the proposed National Baha'i Centre, suggesting that the community should work together to build a symbol of peace for future generations. Mr. Hariri advised that a lot of misinformation has been circulating – explaining that the Baha'i has 9 holy days rather than 15, and that most of the temple's residents have been referencing are continental temples rather than national temples, which attract larger crowds Mr. Hariri explained that Baha'i promotes diversity and social cohesion and understands the beauty of the lands.

Deana Yau spoke in opposition to the Baha'i National Centre, expressing the following concerns: the impact it will have on the meadow's ecosystem; that there will be too many strangers visiting the community; and that visitors will leave trash in the meadow that will need to be cleaned. Ms. Yau noted that she preferred a housing development in this location if she had to choose between the two alternatives.

Shaheeda Kirtane suggested that Markham should buy the subject lands to protect the green space and that the Baha'i National Centre should be built in another location. Ms. Kirtane expressed the following concerns regarding the proposal: that the temple would be higher than the tree line; and that there has not been broader public consultation on the project.

Jill Rocha expressed the following concern regarding the proposed development: that the meadow is an environmentally sensitive area; that a significant number of mature trees will be lost; that the proposal will create erosion; and that the natural habitat needs to be protected for future generations.

Staff and the Applicant responded to questions from the Public.

Members of Council thanked the public for their feedback.

Moved by Regional Councillor Jim Jones

Seconded by Councillor Keith Irish

1. That the deputations by Valerie Burke, Karne McKye, Edith Kangas, Wendy Sun, Kimberley Seymour, Ingrid Ling, Evelin Ellison, Mark Newton, Bob Watts, Hajar Gilani, Melanie Heilbronn, Gail Lavery, Jack Heath, Sue Mason, Samira Jahanpour, Harcharan (Harry) Singh, Jeff Minuk, Stan Lapidus, Maryam Sabzevari, Jamaal Merrick, Paul Zammit, Howard Shore, Ashkan Tabid, Angel Sze, Behzad Saison, Rebecca Yau, Naysan Hariri, Deana Yau, Shaheeda Kirtane, and Jill Rocha, be received; and,
2. That the written submission by Michelle Howorth, Howard Ipp, Don & Collen Bone, Keith McFadden, Mike Araujo, Rhona Charney, Sylvia Gordner, Hans Hopfner, Sofia Konstantonis, Hazel & Don Hamilton, Pual Whittington, Rose Muckle, Florence Wang, Melanie Buckle, Laurie Zrudlo (Bahai Council of Quebec), Regional Council (Baha'i Atlantic Provinces), Jason Burtwistle (Baha'i Council of British Columbia), Sally Greenough (Regional Baha'i Council of Saskatchewan and Manitoba), Tony Liu (Baha'i Council of Alberta), Jeffrey & Tania Minuk, and Jennifer Chan, be received; and,
3. That the Report entitled, "PUBLIC MEETING INFORMATION REPORT, Applications by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'í's, for Official Plan and Zoning By-law Amendments to permit a Bahá'í National Centre and Temple, File No. PLAN 22 262723 (Ward 1)", be received; and,
4. That the Record of the Public Meeting held on May 28, 2024, with respect to the proposed Official Plan and Zoning By-law Amendment to permit a Bahá'í National Centre and Temple at 7200 and 7290 Leslie Street as amended to include the property at 7015 Leslie Street, File No. PLAN 22 262723, be received; and further,
5. That the Applications by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'í's, to amend the Markham Official Plan 2014 and Zoning By-laws 1767, 2612 and 304-87, as amended, be referred back to staff for a report and recommendation to evaluate the proposal.
6. That Staff be authorized and directed to do all things necessary to give effect to this resolution.

Carried

5. ADJOURNMENT

Moved by Councillor Keith Irish
Seconded by Councillor Reid McAlpine

The Development Services Public Meeting adjourned at 10:40 PM.

Carried