

Thornhill Sub-Committee

Minutes

April 9, 2024, 7:00 PM - 9:00 PM
Electronic Meeting

Sub-Committee Members	Regional Councillor Jim Jones, Chair Councillor Keith Irish Councillor Andrew Keyes Councillor Isa Lee	Councillor Ritch Lau Councillor Amanda Collucci Councillor Juanita Nathan
Regrets	Mayor Frank Scarpitti (Ex-Officio) Deputy Mayor Michael Chan (Ex-Officio)	Regional Councillor Joe Li (Ex-Officio)
Council Members and Staff	Giulio Cescato, Director of Planning & Urban Design Rick Cefaratti, Senior Planner, West District Patrick Wong, Senior Natural Heritage Planner	Hristina Giantsopoulos, Election & Committee Coordinator Councillor Ried McAlpine Councillor Karen Rea Laura Gold, Council/Committee Coordinator

1. CALL TO ORDER

The Thornhill Sub-Committee convened at 7:05 PM with Regional Councillor Jim Jones in the Chair

That the Committee recessed from 9:25 – 9:35 AM.

2. DISCLOSURE OF PECUNIARY INTEREST

There were no disclosures of pecuniary interest.

3. APPROVAL OF THE PREVIOUS MINUTES

3.1 MINUTES OF THE JANUARY 24, 2024, THORNHILL SUB-COMMITTEE MEETING

Moved by Councillor Keith Irish
Seconded by Councillor Andrew Keyes

That the minutes of the January 24, 2024, Thornhill Sub-Committee be approved as presented.

Carried

4. COMMUNICATIONS

Moved by Councillor Keith Irish
Seconded by Councillor Andrew Keyes

1. That the written submissions from the following individuals be received for information purposes:
 - Valerie Burke
 - Sue Mason
 - Eileen Carter
 - Gail and John Lavery
 - Brian Frank

Carried

5. PRESENTATIONS

5.1 NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY OF THE BAHÁ'Í'S C/O MALONE GIVEN PARSONS LTD., APPLICATION FOR OFFICIAL PLAN AMENDMENT AND ZONING BY-LAW AMENDMENT TO PERMIT A NEW BAHÁ'Í NATIONAL CENTRE

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

Councillor Keith Irish advised he will be hosting a Community Information Meeting on May 2, 2024, and that the City will be holding Statutory Development Services Public Meeting on a future date on the New Baha'i National Centre Application.

The Clerk provided an overview of the notification process for the Statutory Development Services Public Meeting on the New Baha'i National Centre Application.

The Committee passed a motion to expand the statutory notification for the Development Services Public Meeting to a 500 metre radius from the standard 200 metre radius for the New Baha'i National Centre application.

The Applicant's team provided a presentation on the revised proposal for the New Baha'i National Centre.

The following deputations were made on the proposed development:

Mark Newton provided a deputation expressing the following concerns regarding the proposed development: the temple remains a massive and imposing structure; that the Baha'i is being expanded to include lodging in a residential community; that the residents will be exposed to unsightly garbage from the lodging complex; that the tree canopy will be destroyed; that not enough parking is being proposed to support the anticipated number of visitors; that the local roads will not be able to handle the traffic flow the proposal will create; that the Bahai will be dominating the community; that raising of Leslie Street creates its own unique issues and questioned who would pay for this; that they may not be exempt from taxes for the lodging; and that the proposal is not respectful to the community. Mr. Newton submitted a series of questions to be answered by City Staff.

Edith Kangas, President of Settler Park Residents Association, shared pictures of the wildlife at the park and expressed her concern that the development proposal will disrupt the wildlife and their natural habitat. Ms. Kangas explained how the meadow has played an increasingly important role as a sanctuary for wildlife due to habitat loss in a rapidly developing urban environment. Ms. Kangas was worried that the beautiful meadow, and the wildlife's habitat and ecosystem would be destroyed if the proposal went forward.

Hajar Gilani, a resident residing close to the development proposal, advised that he moved to this area due to it being a peaceful area. Mr. Gilani expressed concern that the proposal includes lodging and an event centre, as these types of facilities do not fit into a residential community. Mr. Gilani suggested that the lodging should not be exempt from municipal taxes if it is run as a commercial business. Mr. Gilani questioned if the proposal for Leslie a sufficient long-term solution was and advocated for a bridge to address the erosion instead of raising Leslie. Mr. Gilani also questioned why the Baha'i has presumably purchased a house on Waterloo Court.

Valerie Burke explained that she was pleased that the emergency access road was removed, but that she was still concerned regarding the impact the project will have on the ecological German Mills Creek wildlife corridor and on the health of residents that reap numerous physical and mental benefits from the natural oasis. Ms. Burke also

expressed the following additional concerns regarding the proposal: that it would lead to a loss of biodiversity at a time of a climate change crisis; the light pollution the project will create and the impact it will have on humans and wildlife; the paving of the lands and cramming of building on the lands; that the project does not seem to consider the environmental considerations; that there is only a two year warranty for the proposed landscaping; and that the landscaping by the temple appears to be a very manicured garden that does not fit with the meadow.

Wendy Sun made a deputation expressing the following concerns regarding the proposed development: that a lodging centre was being built at the end of Leslie Street in a residential community; the vast number of mature trees that will be torn down at a time when forests are already under threat from climate change; the traffic and parking issues the large crowds of tourist will create; that emergency vehicles will have difficulty accessing the proposal due to the large crowds it will create; that is not being built on an arterial road; that lot 4, the Don Valley Education Centre is located on a flood plain, and that the only road accessing the facility floods when there is heavy rain. Ms. Sun asked the City to provide the exact number of trees being removed from the proposal.

Kimberley Seymour, Vice-President, Settlers Park Resident Association, spoke in opposition to the proposal in its current format due to the detrimental impact it will have on wildlife, unnecessary tree loss, light pollution, traffic issues, and the disruption it will cause to residents. Ms. Seymour also expressed concern that the site is too small and too sensitive for a national temple, and that the site lacks the necessary infrastructure to support a national temple. Ms. Seymour made the following suggestions regarding the proposal: that the visitors centre and parking lot be moved to another location; that the national temple be moved to the edge of the forest and that it only be two stories in height; that the trail network be removed from the sensitive lands; that the foot print of the proposal be reduced significantly. Ms. Seymour submitted questions that she requested be answered.

Ingrid Ling, resident residing close to the development proposal, expressed the following concerns and feedback on the development proposal: that the Baha'i National Centre is being proposed in a sensitive meadow; that other Baha'i National Centres attract large numbers of visitors per year; the environmental pollution the event centre will generate; the traffic the proposal will generate with the high number of observant holidays under the Baha'i faith; that the Baha'i may be making a profit from renting its facility or from the lodging and that all government regulation will need to be adhered to; and that the proposal encroaches on the meadow that many residents enjoy.

Peter Cheng expressed the following concerns regarding the proposed development: that the National Baha'i Centre is proposed to be built at the end of a dead end street; that the proposal will worsen existing traffic issues on Leslie Street, specifically at the

intersection of Leslie Street and Steeles Avenue; and that the Baha'i is underestimating the number of visitors its national centre will likely attract; that the proposal includes lodging; that site location is not on an arterial road; that project will make it difficult for wildlife to travel safely; and that the project is too vast and costly to both the environment and community.

The Committee consented to reading Jeff Minuk's deputation rather than having it read out loud.

Wendy Sun provided a deputation on behalf of Gail Lavery, expressing the following concerns regarding the proposal: the devastating impact it will have on the natural environment; that the temple will dominate the area due to its height; the loss of mature trees; that it is unclear why lodging is needed at a place of worship; that there is no information available on the capacity of the proposed event centre and administrative building; and the traffic it will create on Waterloo Court.

Brian Frank expressed the following concerns regarding the proposed development: that the construction of proposal will change the landscape and habitat of the green space; the general disruption and pollution from the construction of the proposal; and that the project will affect the meadow's ecosystem. Mr. Frank suggested that Markham should be very proud of the meadow and advocated for its protection.

Emma McDougall a high school student that frequently enjoys the therapeutic nature of the meadow with her friends, provided a deputation asking the adults to protect the meadow and the wildlife that live in it for future generation. Ms. McDougall expressed concern regarding the number of trees that would cut down, and the impact the proposal will have on the birds and other wildlife. Ms. McDougall asked that City honour its sustainability goals, to protect the public, and respect the natural and built environments through excellence in sustainable community planning and infrastructure management.

Oliva Lemieux, elementary student, representing the Bayview Fairways Environmental Club, provided a deputation expressing the following concerns regarding the proposed development: that many trees will be cut down – some of which are more than 100 years old; and that a lot of wildlife will lose their homes.

Harry Singh, President, German Mills Ratepayer Association, expressed the following concerns regarding the proposed development: that the proposed access road has been replaced with a larger scale solution that will be disruptive to natural flora and fauna; that the project will be a major tourist attraction combined with lodging and an event centre rather than a quiet place of worship; that the construction of the project will disrupt the meadow and disturb the greenbelt, destroying something that cannot be recreated; and that the project is being rushed. Mr. Singh asked the City to take their time with this project to ensure all issues are addressed prior to it moving forward.

Esther Ravka, Board of Directors, Thornhill Garden and Horticultural Society and a resident residing near the Baha'i, expressed the following concerns regarding the proposed development: that many of the birds, animals, and insects living in the meadow will lose their home; that many greenways are being destroyed and that this project could be built in a less sensitive area; that tearing down so many trees will have a negative impact on the ecosystem; and that the meadow needs to be preserved for future generations to enjoy. Ms. Ravka asked that Members of Council seriously consider the deputations made this evening and to take action to preserve the future of the meadow.

Theresa Moore, local resident and park user, provided a deputation expressing concern that the proposed development will disturb wildlife and fragment their habitat. Ms. Moore was also concerned that the proposed road will negatively affect wildlife and vegetation if proper measures are not taken to protect them, such as creating a wildlife passage. Ms. Moore suggested that the Applicant should maintain a distance of 100 metres from the nesting site and that this should be considered in the plans for the proposal. Ms. Moore also suggested that there should be no trail adjacent to lot 3, and that there should be no east-west trail. Ms. Moore further suggested that the proposed parking lot should be relocated from lot 2 to lot 1 to protect the wildlife corridor and to maintain more distance between visitors and wildlife.

James Laframboise expressed concern that the proposed development will create light pollution that harms wildlife and humans and deprives the next generation of the educational experience of seeing the stars.

Jill Rocha registered to speak but did not speak.

Sue Mason, Thornhill resident, provided a deputation advising that the preservation and restoration of Settlers Park created a picturesque landscape, a home for wildlife, and a place for many to enjoy. Questioning the point of restoring the meadow only to destroy part of the forest and wildlife corridor. Noted that the location of the National Baha'i Centre should be in a central location that is easily accessible, as the proposed location of will greatly impact the existing community. The proposal is also not in compliance with Markham's Green Print Strategy, and with climate change and environmental decline, emphasizing that we must do our utmost to preserve and protect what little precious green space that remains.

Jeremy Lee, resident residing walking distance from the development proposal, expressed concern that the Baha'i proposal will change the existing family-oriented community into a Baha'i compound. Mr. Lee was concerned that a house on Waterloo Court was recently believed to be purchased by the Baha'i. Mr. Lee asked Members of Council to protect his community from being turned into a Baha'i compound rather than a safe family community.

Melanie Heilbronn expressed concern that the development proposal will negatively impact the home values of properties located on Waterloo Court as the road will serve as an entrance to a major tourist attraction if the proposal is approved. Ms. Heilbronn suggested that the proposal should not be built in this location as there are many features of the proposal that are not permitted in a residential zone, and the community is greatly opposed to the project. Ms. Heilbronn's greatest concern was parking, as similar Baha'i National Centres attract large numbers of tourists, questioning where the tourist buses will park. Ms. Heilbronn suggested that Waterloo Court should remain as it is.

Peter Young, resident that resides in a home that backs onto the meadow, explained how the former landfill has become an oasis within the City that brings tranquility to many people in the community. Mr. Young expressed the following concerns regarding the proposal: there has been a lack of transparency regarding the proposal; that the location is not suitable for the proposal; that the proposal does not protect the meadow for future generations to enjoy; that the anticipated number of visitors to the proposal seems to be underestimated given the amount of tourist that visit other Baha'i National Centres; and, that the resources the City has invested into the preservation of the meadow and park would be wasted. Mr. Young hoped that Members of Council will listen to their constituents and that a suitable solution could be drawn up that would allow residents to continue to enjoy the meadow.

Jack Heath provided the following feedback on the proposed development: suggested that a smaller meeting be held to discuss the issues with a few residents, a few Councillors, and Staff; that the residents have made excellent points regarding their concerns with the proposal, but that Baha'i has also demonstrated the willingness to modify its first proposal; supported holding a community information meeting on the revised proposal; suggested that the Baha'i, as a major property owner in this location, participate in a community environmental project; and suggested that an ecological corridor be created by transferring the woodlot located in the valley near Steeles Avenue to the City.

Stan Lapidus made a deputation advising that the proposal of having an expanded Baha'i footprint offered no benefit to the existing community. Mr. Lapidus noted that adding concrete will disrupt the beautiful meadow. Mr. Lapidus urged Members of Council to vote against this proposal as it is not compatible or in harmony with the existing community.

Evelin Ellison provided the following feedback on the proposed development: supported Jack Heath's suggestion of having a smaller meeting with key stakeholders to discuss the issues and possibly come to a consensus; questioned if an archeological and ecological study was being conducted as the aboriginal people lived on this land before any of the settlers and due to the environmental sensitivity of the land; and suggested that the existing building be renovated rather than demolished to produce less CO₂.

Danielia Canciu expressed the following concerns regarding the proposed development: that it will draw a significant number of visitors to the community; that the proposal does not include enough parking and that visitors will park on the nearby residential streets; that the majority of the existing community is opposed to the project; and that the project will create happiness for one group of people at the expense of another.

Joe Canciu spoke in opposition to the proposal, noting that most of the community is unhappy with the proposal.

Paul Zammit, President, Bayview Fairways Ratepayer Association, expressed the following concerns regarding the proposed development: that the real-estate values of houses located on Waterloo Court would fall by 10-15% if the project was approved as it would cause a visible change to the landscape of the area due to it not contextually fitting into the existing community; that there will be a negative impact on the tranquility of the neighbourhood; and that there will be construction for 7 to 8 years causing noise pollution and traffic that will have a significant negative impact on residents and wildlife. Mr. Zammit noted that despite good intentions, this is the wrong location for this project and just because Baha'i owns the land it does not mean that they need to build a temple in this location. Mr. Zammit proposed that Markham consider purchasing the Baha'i lands to prevent the lands from being overdeveloped and to protect the greenway.

Staff and the Applicant provided the following responses to inquiries from the public:

A Committee Member clarified that the City purchased the Shouldice property to ensure there is enough parkland for future residents due to the amount of density coming to the community as result of the Yonge North Subway extension rather than to prevent development from occurring.

Stephen Lue, Senior Manager, Development, clarified that this application is not subject to Bill 109, but noted that the Applicant is in a position where it could appeal the application to the Ontario Land Tribunal at any time.

The Applicant clarified that the lodging centre will not be operating as a hotel rather it will provide lodging for members coming from across the country. Moreover, the event centre will not be operating as a commercial venue, but as a place members can hold meetings.

Members of Council asked staff to provide responses to the questions from the public, ideally some of the answers could be provided at the Community Information Meeting on the Baha'i application.

The Committee thanked the public for their deputations and written submissions.

Moved Councillor Keith Irish

Seconded by Councillor Andrew Keyes

That the statutory notice for the upcoming Development Services Public Meeting be expanded to a 500 metre radius for the New Baha'i National Centre Application.

Carried

Moved by Councillor Isa Lee
Seconded Councillor Andrew Keyes

That the deputations on the New Baha'i National Centre application be received.

Carried

6. ADJOURNMENT

The Thornhill Sub-Committee adjourned at 10:45 PM.