

Interim Committee to Preserve Thornhill Woods Neighbourhood

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4 February 2014

John MacKenzie
Commissioner of Planning
City of Vaughan
2141 Major Mackenzie Drive,
Vaughan, Ontario, L6A 1T1
Email: john.mackenzie@vaughan.ca

Committee of the Whole
City of Vaughan
Vaughan Civic Centre
2141 Major Mackenzie Drive,
Vaughan, Ontario, L6A 1T1
Email: clerks@vaughan.ca

Dear Mr. MacKenzie and Members of Council:

**Re: 9000 Bathurst Street, City of Vaughan
File Numbers OP.13.013 and Z.13.036
Preliminary Concerns**

We are directing this letter to the Committee of the Whole and to the Commissioner of Planning on behalf of a large number of residents of the Thornhill Woods neighbourhood, including residents of Ner Israel Drive, Knightshade Drive, Bathurst Glen Drive, and Apple Blossom Drive that are adjacent to 9000 Bathurst Street, the subject site of the above noted applications (the "Subject Site" and "Applications") proposed by the Islamic Shia Ithna-Asheri Jamaat of Toronto (the "Applicant").

Our understanding is that staff are looking to receive public input on the Applications. As residents, we do not have the expertise, at this time, to fully identify the matters which should be of primary concern from a land use planning perspective. Therefore, we are providing our preliminary concerns are set out below, subject to our being able to supplement these concerns as we become more familiar with all aspects of the proposal.

Vaughan Official Plan Urban Structure and Built Form

Our reading of the recently adopted and approved Vaughan Official Plan 2010 ("VOP 2010") suggests to us that the Subject Lands are not intended for the kind of development being proposed by the Applicants. Merely, requesting an official plan amendment does not mean that these carefully considered and recently approved policies should be set aside.

The Subject Site is part of the Carrville Community Area. The Subject Site is designated "Low Rise Residential" on Schedule 13. The Subject Site is not identified as an Intensification Area on Schedule 1.

The proposed development is entirely inconsistent with the policies of VOP 2010 applying to Community Areas and inconsistent with the policies of the VOP 2010 which identify where intensification of the type proposed will occur, which is not in the Carrville Community Area.

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In this context, we request that staff consider whether the Applications conform with the policies of VOP 2010, in particular the Intensification Area and Community Area policies of VOP 2010, including consideration of the following policies, some of which we have underlined for emphasis:

2.1 Planning For Growth

2.1.3 Defining Vaughan's Transformation: Key Planning Objectives

2.1.3.2. To address the City's main land-use planning challenges and to manage future growth by:

c. identifying Intensification Areas, consistent with the intensification objectives of this Plan and the Regional Official Plan, as the primary locations for accommodating intensification

e. ensuring the character of established communities are maintained;

p. planning and designing communities in a manner that facilitates inclusivity and accessibility for residents, workers and visitors." ...

2.2 The Shape of Transformation

2.2.1 Vaughan's Urban Structure

2.2.1.1. That Schedule 1 illustrates the planned Urban Structure of the City of Vaughan, which achieves the following objectives:

b. maintains the stability of lands shown as Community Areas for a variety of low-rise residential purposes, including related parks, community, institutional and retail uses;

d. establishes a hierarchy of Intensification Areas that range in height and intensity of use...

2.2.3 Community Areas

2.2.3. ... Vaughan's existing Community Areas are characterized by predominantly low-rise residential housing stock, with local amenities including local retail, community facilities, schools and parks, and they provide access to the City's natural heritage and open spaces. The policies of this Plan will protect and strengthen the character of these areas. As the City grows and matures, these Community Areas will remain mostly stable. However, incremental change is expected as a natural part of maturing neighbourhoods. This change will be sensitive to, and respectful of, the existing character of the area. ...

2.2.3.2. That Community Areas are considered stable areas and therefore Community Areas with existing development are not intended to experience significant physical change. New development that respects and reinforces the existing scale, height,

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massing, lot pattern, building type, character, form and planned function of the immediate local area is permitted, as set out in the policies in Chapter 9 of this Plan.

2.2.3.3. That limited intensification may be permitted in Community Areas as per the land use designations on Schedule 13 and in accordance with the policies of Chapter 9 of this Plan. The proposed development must be sensitive to and compatible with the character, form and planned function of the surrounding context.

2.2.5 Intensification Areas

2.2.5 ...The development of Intensification Areas will support the policies of this Plan related to stable areas will be maintained. Specifically, existing Community Areas will not see significant physical change as the vast majority of residential development within the built boundary will take place within Intensification Areas.

9.1 Elements of a Great City

9.1.2 Urban Design and Built Form

9.1.2.1. That new development will respect and reinforce the existing and planned context within which it is situated. More specifically, the built form of new developments will be designed to achieve the following general objectives:

a. in Community Areas, new development will be designed to respect and reinforce the physical character of the established neighbourhood within which it is located as set out in policy 9.1.2.2...

9.1.2.2. That in Community Areas with established development, new development be designed to respect and reinforce the existing physical character and uses of the surrounding area, paying particular attention to the following elements:

- a. the local pattern of lots, streets and blocks;
- b. the size and configuration of lots;
- c. the building type of nearby residential properties;
- d. the heights and scale of nearby residential properties;
- e. the setback of buildings from the street;
- f. the pattern of rear and side-yard setbacks; and
- g. conservation and enhancement of heritage buildings, heritage districts and cultural heritage landscapes.

9.2 Land Use Designations and Permitted Buildings Types

9.2.3 Building Types and Development Criteria

Townhouses

9.2.3.2. The following policies and development criteria apply to Townhouses:

a. A Townhouse is a low-rise residential building, up to three storeys in height, situated on a single parcel and part of a row of at least three but no more than six attached residential units.

d. Townhouses shall generally front onto a public street. Townhouse blocks not fronting onto a public street are only permitted if the unit(s) flanking a public street provide(s) a front-yard and front-door entrance facing the public street.

High-Rise Buildings

9.2.3.6 The following policies and development criteria apply to High-Rise Buildings:

d. In order to provide appropriate privacy and daylight conditions for people living and working within High-Rise Buildings, to minimize shadows created by High-Rise Buildings, and to contribute to overall excellence in the City's urban design, High-Rise Buildings should be designed as slender towers and spaced appropriately through the following criteria:

i. the floorplate, measured as the total area contained within the exterior face of the building excluding balconies, for portions of High-Rise Buildings above the twelfth storey generally shall be no greater than 850 square metres, except for High-Rise Buildings containing office uses above the twelfth storey;

Natural Heritage

A portion of the Subject Site is designated "Natural Area" on Schedule 13 and identified as a "Core Features" on Schedule 2. We request that staff consider whether the Applications provide the protection and connections to the natural areas, as specified in the VOP 2010 policies set out below.

9.1 Elements of a Great City

9.1.1.8. To strengthen Vaughan's network of natural areas as a defining characteristic of the City by:

a. protecting and enhancing the Core Features, Enhancement Areas, Built-up Valley Lands, and other lands in the Greenbelt Plan and Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan that together comprise the Natural Heritage Network, as

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identified in Schedule 2, and, specifically, securing wherever possible, through the development process, such lands for public purposes;

b. actively seeking, through the development process, to connect natural areas with existing parks, open spaces, pedestrian trails, greenways and bicycle routes;

c. improving, where appropriate, the physical and visual access to natural areas;

d. requiring new development adjacent to natural areas provides sufficient buffering to protect and conserve the ecological functions of such natural areas; and

e. orienting new development to maximize public access and views onto natural areas, where appropriate.

There is also a significant woodlot in the southwest corner of the Subject Site. We request staff to consider how all or a significant part of the woodlot might be incorporated into development plans for the Subject Site.

Municipal Services

VOP 2010 contains the following policy regarding municipal services:

8.2 Municipal Services

8.2.1 Providing Efficient and Timely Municipal Services

In partnership with York Region, Vaughan provides water, wastewater and stormwater service to all areas of the City within the urban area. Reliable and efficient municipal services require long-term planning and maintenance. Increasing reinvestment will be required to maintain a state of good repair and to adapt to changing demands and new service requirements.

8.2.1.2. That water and waste water capacity, assigned by York Region, be allocated by the City in a manner that supports the policies of this Plan and with other Council approved policies with respect to servicing capacity. Intensification Areas shall be the priority when allocating servicing capacity.

Since the Subject Site is not located within an Intensification Area, servicing capacity for development that is not permitted by the “Low Rise Residential” designation should not be allocated to the Subject Site.

We have serious concerns regarding the capacity of the existing infrastructure to support the proposed development. Our neighbourhood has experienced issues with low water pressure, flooded basements, and electrical brownouts during the summer months.

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The Subject Site has been planned for low density residential development; not the intensity of the development proposed by the Applicants. This higher intensity development would put greater strains on community infrastructure, as will the development of the two former Catholic school sites.

The Functional Servicing Report prepared for the Applicants provides the following recommendations:

- *The existing sanitary sewer on Knightshade Drive between manholes 1A and 541A will be surcharged. A further analysis should be provided for the downstream sewer. (page 16)*
- *To ensure that all flows can be met, a performance test of the water supply infrastructure is recommended. (page 13)*
- *It is recommended to perform hydrant pressure tests to ensure the sufficient pressure for the low-rise development. It should be noted that the Mechanical Engineer will verify if the boosting pump is required for the high-rise building. (page 14)*

We request that independent studies be carried out by the City of Vaughan to evaluate the impact of the Applications, in conjunction with the impact of the development of the two former Catholic school sites, on the water infrastructure, sewer/drainage infrastructure, and electrical system. We refer you to the letter prepared by local resident Mr. Kalpin, P. Eng for more detailed information.

In-Effect Official Plan

In the staff report to the Committee of the Whole for 4 February 2014 meeting, staff describe the OPA #600 as the “in-effect” official plan. We are advised that VOP 2010 was approved by the Ontario Municipal Board (except for some site specific or area specific appeals) by Order dated 8 August 2013, which order indicates that VOP 2010 is in effect as of 23 July 2013.

The Applications were submitted in October 2013. The Applicant’s Planning Justification Report indicates that the VOP 2010 is the in-force official plan for the Subject Site.

We request that staff confirm that the Applications should be considered in the context VOP 2010.

York Region Official Plan Intensification Policies

We request that staff consider whether the Applications conform with the intensification policies of the York Region Official Plan - 2010, in particular:

5.3 Intensification

Intensification will occur in strategic locations in the built-up area to maximize efficiencies in infrastructure delivery, human services provision and transit ridership. These strategic locations are based on an intensification framework that recognizes that the highest density and scale of development will occur in the Regional Centres followed by the Regional Corridors. Local municipalities will identify smaller intensification areas within these strategic locations to accommodate a significant portion of future residential

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and employment growth. Planning effectively for intensification ensures clarity and certainty as to where development should occur.

Map 1 of the York Region Official Plan clearly identifies Regional Centres and Regional Corridors. The Subject Site is not in any of the identified Regional Centres or Regional Corridors. As mentioned above, the Subject Site is also not in any of the intensification areas identified by the local municipality of Vaughan.

Parking and Traffic

We request that staff carefully consider the traffic and parking implications in connection with the Applications. We note that the present use of the Ja'ffari Centre has caused serious concerns and conflicts, which continue, notwithstanding past promises to correct the situation. In summary,

- There is insufficient parking, particularly during the holy days, which results in overflow parking on the neighbourhood streets and on occasions private driveways.
- There are pedestrian safety concerns with high speed traffic. For instance, Ner Israel Drive has consistently experienced traffic and parking issues such as high speed traffic up and down hill and non-compliance to traffic stop signs, except when the street is monitored by electronic devices, visible police presence and city officials at critical times of the day or night (which are not permanent solutions).
- There is a general concern regarding traffic congestion along Bathurst street and local roads.

Schools

Currently, local schools Carrville Mills Elementary, Thornhill Woods Elementary and Stephen Lewis High School are filled to capacity. We question how Council plans to provide schooling for the potentially large number of new residents. Both Carrville Mills Elementary and Thornhill Woods Elementary and Stephen Lewis High School are already at maximum capacity and therefore existing children from the neighbourhood zoned for these schools, including children who live directly across from one school, have to be bused elsewhere. Busing is an additional cost borne by the taxpayer, adds to the carbon footprint and breaks the implicit promise of regional neighbourhood schools. As current residents already cannot be accommodated at their home school, the appropriateness of permitting a high density structure to be built without the necessary support infrastructure to accommodate more children, needs to be carefully studied.

Cultural Campus

The Applicant's Planning Justification Report references the Joseph and Wolf Lebovic Jewish Community Campus and the Ahmadiyya Peace Village, as local precedents of similar "cultural campuses".

We request that staff investigate the comparability of these "cultural campuses", including comparing the types of uses, built form, public accessibility, cultural inclusivity/exclusivity, etc. Our initial investigations suggest to us that there is no comparability.

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Community Input

We request that the community be thoroughly involved in the planning process in regard to the Applications.

Yours very truly,

Rom Koubi, on behalf of the Interim Committee to Preserve Thornhill Woods Neighbourhood

- c. Carol Birch, Planner, City of Vaughan
Sandra Yeung Racco, Ward 4 Councillor, City of Vaughan
Dennis Wood, Wood Bull LLP
Irit Koubi, Interim Committee to Preserve Thornhill Woods Neighbourhood
Elena Serebryany, Interim Committee to Preserve Thornhill Woods Neighbourhood
Hagay Marian, Interim Committee to Preserve Thornhill Woods Neighbourhood
Benny Kritzer, Interim Committee to Preserve Thornhill Woods Neighbourhood
Boris Arkanov, Interim Committee to Preserve Thornhill Woods Neighbourhood
Rakesh Nayyar, Interim Committee to Preserve Thornhill Woods Neighbourhood