

Developer revises controversial Neville Park condo project

Local councillor, residents group pleased but still on guard

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The developer of a controversial condominium in the Beach has decided to revise the project so it fits within the guidelines of the City of Toronto's official plan.

"It's a process that always happens. We present the idea, have consultations, review it and move forward," said Dermot Sweeny of Sweeny Sterling, Finlayson and Co. Architects, adding he's followed this system successfully for 25 years now.

Sweeny, who is collaborating on the high-end project with partners George Kaiser and Neheel Suleman, initially proposed a five-storey, 16-unit condominium as well as one detached house at the foot of Neville Park Boulevard.

The controversy lies in the fact that Sweeny Sterling Finlayson and Co. Architects would have to amend the official plan and rezone 2 and 4 Neville Park Blvd. and 438 and 440 Lakefront Lane. They had requested a variance of 5.4 metres in height and 1.34 times more than the permitted density of the area.

However, on Oct. 5, the developer asked the planning department to hold the application for 2 and 4 Neville Park Blvd. in abeyance so that design revisions could be made.

Sweeny, who plans on living in the condo, said the project is being modified to take into account community feedback such as maintaining more trees on the site as well as reducing the development's height and density.

"We're looking at saving more existing trees on the site. I think that's valuable and a good thing," he said. "A lot of comments (from the public) seemed to focus on the size. I certainly think five storeys and the kind of project we were promoting was reasonable."

Regardless, Sweeny said his team would be revising those details. "The community thinks it's too large. We're looking at reducing it," he said, noting that no official timeline has been set for re-submitting the plans to the city. "There's a lot of work to do. My plan is to do something that is better for the city and the environment."

Sweeny said he also has no intention of appealing the project at the Ontario Municipal Board.

"It's not how we work," he said.

Earlier this year, the newly formed Beach Lakefront Neighbourhood Association, a group of local residents who have banded together to stop the controversial housing development from going up in the Neville Park area, started making their views clear about the potentially precedent-setting development.

With the support of Ward 32 (Beaches-East York) Councillor Sandra Bussin, area residents are working to curb the development from harming the character of the primarily single-family home community.

And while the association sees the revision as a good sign, it's still remaining cautious.

"We are really happy that the developer can see he's got a strong opposition to the proposal," said spokesperson Harold Tabone.

"We're not easing up though. We're still making arrangements to have all kinds of fundraisers."

Tabone said he hopes the developer is coming forward in good faith to work with the community, but ultimately area residents would be happiest if the plan was to build a few single family homes on the site.

"The redesign might just be a way to garner planning department support," Bussin speculated. "Based on the amount they've invested, we still think the design will go above what they're allowed."

Sweeny, on the other hand, said he feels the community has been relentless in its criticism of the project.

"I think it's extremely harsh. It's very strange to me. What we're trying to do is build a beautiful project on the waterfront," he said. "It's a good project. I think people are overreacting. The community should be worried about the Wal-Mart."