

March 23, 2021

The Corporation of the City of Richmond Hill

225 East Beaver Creek Road

Richmond Hill, ON L4B 3P4

Re: Proposed development application for Official Plan Amendment and Zoning By-Law Amendment (City files D01-20014 and D02-20028) at the northwest corner of Arnold Crescent and Major Mackenzie Drive West (the "Acorn Project Development Proposal")

I attended the Official Plan update several weeks ago moderated by Susan Hall from Lera corporation. I listened to Mayor Dave Barrow, Cybil von Kursaal, David Dixon and Patrick Lee. It was very informative and gave me some background into the Official Plan Update for Richmond Hill heading towards 2041.

I listened to Mr. David Dixon and his thoughts for the possible planning direction for Richmond Hill. He spoke about attracting (and retaining) millennial talent as a key to innovation and a vibrant and diverse community. I was inspired. And I am grateful for a council with the forward thinking to plan to develop community with four pillars of excellence described by Mr. Patrick Lee: (1) Increasing economy, (2) Design excellence, (3) Green and sustainable, and (4) Protect and enhance.

I am writing this letter to express some concerns for the Acorn Project Development Proposal.

My interest is **twofold**. While perhaps not the millennial talent to which Mr. Dixon referred, I am blessed to both live and work in the community of Richmond Hill. I am a Physical Education Teacher, French Teacher and coach at Alexander Mackenzie High School. Alexander Mackenzie High School is, as you may know, one of the adjacent properties to the Acorn Project Development Proposal. At the Official Plan Update meeting, Mr. Dixon referenced the covid effect of a decrease in innovation. I think every profession has been touched by the pandemic. However, even prior to covid, it may be surprising to some that our young people were already facing a mental health crisis. Undoubtedly, there are numerous drivers responsible. I see my role at Alexander Mackenzie, as a Phys. Ed. Teacher and basketball coach, as someone to help students navigate an increasingly challenging world through movement and its associated self-medicating effects.

However, over the past number of years I have noticed something disturbing. I am receiving more and more young students in my classes who are essentially non-movers. Rather than teaching them new sports and games, I actually have to first to teach many of them how to run, jump and fall. Why is that?

Society is of course quick to blame technology for obesity and lack of play. No doubt technology plays a role in our reduced activity levels. But, in addition to technology, so does parents' investment in time with their children and children's ability to play in their environment. Environment is a primary concern. Collateral damage of urbanization has been a drastic reduction in young peoples' casual opportunities to roam their surroundings and engage in regular movement. There are more high-density buildings with less green space and less quality green space. In spite of an increasingly complex urban existence, it has been and continues to be my pleasure to help students conquer these challenges. The effects of both **community** and **space** at Alexander Mackenzie is a blessing to my students. However, should the development proposal be approved I fear my students stand to lose in both these aspects of community and space.

Community

I take my students on runs in the residential community that surrounds the school. We are fortunate to have a couple of options. Our shorter run, called our Mill Pond Run, is exactly as it sounds- we run from the school to idyllic Mill Pond and back. Our longer version we call our Terry Fox Run. This route takes us north along Trench, east along Rumble and then we wind our way along the beautiful small residential roads of Lucas, Mill, Hall, Elizabeth finishing with a sweep down Arnold Crescent back to the school along Major Mackenzie.

Over the years I have come to realize that my students get far more out of this regular foray into the community than just fitness. I teach them to give right of way to people they encounter along sidewalks, I teach them the hospital is a place of healing and to be mindful of what people might be dealing with. I train them to point their intent at intersections and wave thank you to vehicle operators.

But here is the best part. Since I live in the community that I work in, my students get real feedback. I can relay back to them when a local community member tells me how awesome my group of kids looked out on their run, often complimenting their good community interaction. My young people smile when they hear this news the following day. Community. Should this development proceed my students will lose our cherished Terry Fox running route and the community that they engage in. I will not be able to in good conscience continue to take them out running in their community with the proposed level of increased density and the associated traffic that will come with it.

Space

The school is blessed with land. And in my Phys. Ed. Department we use all of it. In normal times, if you are travelling along Major Mackenzie you may catch a glimpse of our epic capture the flag battles. They are legendary. You would be hard pressed anywhere else to see students run and move with maximum effort for 75 minutes. This is again a credit to my young people and the land we get to enjoy.

However, I also have concerns for this space to the southeast side of our school. The property development plan mentions **redirection of the existing watercourse**. Fed by

this watercourse on the east side of the field lies a lush forest. Each spring, our east field is the last to be ready. In fact, there is so much water running through the established underground watercourse that at the south end of Bridgeford Street South, houses require sump pumps to keep the water out of their basements. My question to council is whether an environmental assessment has been done to ensure the redirection of the watercourse will not impact valuable school property? If it should, what recourse will my students have for their capture the flag battles? Or will their experiences in this greenspace be another casualty of urban development?

I am not naïve to think that urbanization can be held to no development. Nor as a resident do I think we should be immune to development. We need to grow, but to do so responsibly with community and equity at the forefront. In this case, what is the developer providing for and to the community? As Mr. David Dixon points out, "Density without amenity is crowding. Density with amenity is community."

Considering council's established four pillars of excellence, I respectfully request council to consider the impact of this decision on the lives of students with **positive community** interaction and **quality green space** activity for students at Alexander Mackenzie High School.

Thank you for your consideration and your continued effort towards keeping Richmond Hill a great place to work and live.

Yours truly,

Paul Nixon

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