

Submission to Richmond Hill City Council re: Proposed Official Plan and Zoning By-Law Amendment Applications For Norfolk Development Inc. – City Files OPA-23-0002 And ZBLA-23-0003

Prepared by: Richmond Hill resident Michael Theodores – May 15, 2023

Introduction:

As a long-time resident of Richmond Hill – residing just a block and a half from the proposed high-density project by Norfolk Development Inc. – I have prepared this submission for review and consideration by City Council and the planning department.

What follows are comments that I think will demonstrate why I – and many residents in the neighbourhood – **object** to this very aggressive proposal.

Size and Scope:

I'd like to begin by commending the city's planning department for capturing many of the concerns that I and other residents have with how aggressive this proposal is compared to existing by-laws. A copy of the staff report is included within the material that has been prepared for tonight's meeting.

As noted on **Page 4** of the staff report, the proposed floor space index – or FSI – is **5.4** compared to the current permitted density of **2.0** and it is proposing a building height of **16 storeys** abutting the Neighbourhood designation of **3**.

Additionally, it is proposing a maximum permitted base building height of **six storeys from four**.

The stark difference between the proposal and current by-laws are even more jarring when viewing a great table on **Page 8** of the staff report. I've copied and pasted it below and draw your attention the great disparity between the current by-law and proposed standards in the **minimum setbacks, maximum building heights, minimum percentage of usable space of GFA, maximum GFA of Lot area and Maximum Density**.

Development Standard	Standard RM6 Zone under By-law 66-71 as amended	Proposed Standards
Permitted Uses	Apartment	Apartment
Minimum Lot Frontage	38.1 metres (125.0 feet)	Complies
Minimum Lot Area	N/A	N/A
Minimum Setbacks		
• Front Yard	7.62 metres (25.0 feet)*	2.5 metres (8.2 feet)
• Side Yard	6.1 metres (20.0 feet)*	1.4 metres (4.6 feet)
• Rear Yard	7.62 metres (25.0 feet)*	2.5 metres (8.2 feet)
Minimum Floor Area per Dwelling Unit		
• Bachelor	32.5 sq.m (350.0 sq.ft)	Complies
• 1 Bedroom	51.1 sq.m (550.0 sq.ft)	50.5 sq.m (543.6 sq.ft)
• 2 Bedroom	62.7 sq.m (675.0 sq.ft)	Complies
• 3 Bedroom	74.3 metres (800.0 sq.ft)	Complies
• 4 Bedroom	83.6 metres (900.0 sq.ft)	N/A
Maximum Building Height	30.48 metres (100.0 feet)	52.0 metres (171.0 feet)
Minimum Parking	1.75 spaces/unit	0.95 spaces per unit
Minimum Percentage of Usable Open Space of GFA	45%	14%
Maximum GFA Percentage of Lot Area	150%	509%
Maximum Density	60 units per acre	298.53 units per acre

I also appreciate the number of concerns that the planning department highlighted on **Pages 9 and 10** even when factoring that the proposed project is located in the Newkirk Development Area and nearby the Richmond Hill GO station.

Numbers alone don't explain the opposition to this proposal, though, because neighbourhoods and cities are about more than *numbers*. They are about *people*.

Concerns that I have – and which I also heard from other residents during a May 11, 2023 virtual information session hosted by our Councillor Karen Cilevitz – relate to the impact that these numbers would have on area residents.

For example, in close proximity to the east, west and south of the proposed 14 and 16-storey towers are single family homes. Because of this, the **current** by-laws related to height make sense.

I think good planning is about integration – forming a fabric within a community. Instead of *blending* into this established neighbourhood, it would actually *dwarf* it. And that includes the higher part of the two towers that are projected to face a long-time four storey apartment to the north and a 10-storey condo to the northwest which I learned from the planning department only has an FSI of **3.15** despite sitting right on Major Mackenzie Drive East, is at an intersection with signalized lights and is in closer proximity to the Richmond Hill GO station.

City planners made the same observation in their report on **Page 10** when they commented: **“...staff have concerns with the compatibility of the proposed development in relation to the existing built form and character of the surrounding area; in particular with respect to the proximity and height of the proposed residential development to the existing low density residential development to the east, south and west as well as the compatibility with the existing 4 storey residential building to the north.”**

There were also valid concerns during the information meeting about the setback of the proposed project and lack of greenspace. The table on the first page shows little setback on all sides and a very low percentage of open space.

Project more aggressive than many on Yonge Street

In completing research following notice of this proposal in early April, I did a Google search about other planning applications that have been received from the city and I came across [this website page](#). It provides 50 pages of proposals that have been received by the city and are being reviewed.

I encourage you to spend a few minutes sifting through the pages and you'll discover this proposal's height, number of units, number of parking spots and FSI are higher than many proposals for projects on Yonge Street. **Yes, Yonge Street!**

I think that's significant because compared to this area, Yonge Street has superior roads, transit, retail and employment – all important factors in determining the appropriateness of the size and scope of a project.

Additionally, significant investment has been made in transit on the Yonge Street core through bus-only lanes and related infrastructure all the way north to Newmarket. These aren't **concepts** or **projections** or **blue sky sketches** like those being discussed about the future of Major Mackenzie Drive East. **They exist now.**

The danger in approving a project **before** such investments are approved and in development is that while projections and concepts can be revised or even shelved, development projects that are approved are **permanent**. Once they go up, they are there forever. There is no turning back.

While I understand that the city and region is focused on intensifying several areas of Richmond Hill to help meet the province's very aggressive population and housing targets, proposals like this one don't have to do this singlehandedly. I remain puzzled why a large swath of land across from Richmond Heights plaza remains undeveloped and could create thousands of jobs and residential units while also supporting transit.

A city planner confirmed that two other applications for residential projects on Major Mackenzie Drive East – between Yonge and Bayview – have been received. And, they are far more respectful in my opinion. They include:

- **64 and 72 Major Mackenzie Dr. E., 115 and 119 Church Street South – City Files D01-06004** (Official Plan Amendment to support the development is approved), **D02-06015, D06-06027** (the related Zoning By-law Amendment and Site Plan applications are subject to further review)

Description: A request for approval of a revised Site Plan application for one **six storey building terracing down to three storeys (50 units)**, the retention of the existing single detached dwelling along Church Street, the retention of a single detached dwelling relocated from Major Mackenzie Drive to Church Street, and a new semi-detached dwelling along Church Street.

- **286 Major Mackenzie Dr. E. – City Files D02-20016** (Zoning By-law Amendment in support of the development is approved) and **D06-21034** (the related Site Plan application is subject to further review)

Description: A request for approval of a Site Plan Application to facilitate the construction of an **8 storey residential apartment building (rental tenure) comprised of 90 dwelling units, 199 parking spaces, a gross floor area of 6,511.50 square metres (70,089 square feet) and an FSI of 1.17 on the subject lands.**

Unlike the proposal on Norfolk that is set well off Major Mackenzie Drive East, the latter application for 286 Major Mackenzie Drive East is right on Major Mackenzie Drive yet only has an **FSI of 1.17** and is **eight storeys** and has **199 parking spots**. Quite a difference!

Traffic

The degree of density that this proposal features has sparked concerns among neighbourhood residents about the impact this will have on traffic which is already heavy on Major Mackenzie Drive East. I share these same concerns.

In simplified terms, you are exchanging **six existing driveways** of single family homes for **three levels of parking with about 400 parking spots**. This doesn't factor in additional traffic that will be generated from visitors or business activities.

What makes this a bigger concern is the location – a side street (Norfolk Avenue) off of Major Mackenzie Drive East. In addition to the lack of a signalized intersection – like other apartments-condos located at Cedar, Essex and Colborne – Norfolk has a very narrow formation that provides for only a single car in each direction.

Due to these factors, a spillover of traffic on to side streets such as Elmwood – or bottlenecks on Norfolk trying to gain access to Major Mackenzie Drive East or on Major Mackenzie Drive East to enter Norfolk – are a serious concern. Add that to the fact that this is a school zone –

with Walter Scott P.S. directly across the street – and concerns from parents in the neighbourhood need to be addressed.

One of the city’s planners shared a July 2022 traffic report that was submitted by the developer, indicating traffic growth on Major Mackenzie Drive is expected to rise by only about 2%. I think these figures need to be scrutinized further as the traffic was measured in July 2022 – when traffic was much lighter due to the pandemic.

Additionally, it was only measured for a small section of Major Mackenzie Drive East (between Bayview and Colborne). To get a meaningful indication of the flow on Major Mackenzie Drive East, I think it should be at least from Yonge to Bayview but to get a truer sense, from Bathurst to Leslie.

Adding any type of signal at Norfolk and Major Mackenzie Drive East would be problematic since across from Norfolk to the north is actually a parking lot for the school. Even if some complex alteration would be possible, that could result in increased bottlenecks on Major Mackenzie Drive East when traffic flowing from Norfolk had the right of way.

Transit

If there is one topic I know well it is transit. I often say while many people *talk transit*, I actually *take it*. I have taken it consistently for over 35 years and know what makes it attractive and also what makes a car a more convenient choice if you have access to one, It comes down to the three C’s – **Convenience, Coverage and Cost**.

In all three cases for GO transit – which is one of the key selling points for high-density projects in this area – GO receives middling grades.

Convenience has been a major challenge for the line. While all-day, two-way GO service has been promised for years, we’re farther away from that promise than ever.

The half-hour service during peak morning and evening rush hour periods was drastically reduced during the height of the pandemic and has yet to return as demonstrated by the screen cap below of a current GO schedule.

Monday to Friday (except holidays) Du lundi au vendredi (sauf les jours fériés)																				
SOUTHBOUND / EN DIRECTION SUD							NORTHBOUND / EN DIRECTION NORD													
Route Number Numéro du trajet	Zone→ Trip Number Numéro du parcours	Richmond Hill 98 Dp	Richmond Hill 78 Dp	Richmond Hill 50 Richmond Hill GO	Thornhill 60 Langstaff GO	North York 5 North York GO	North York 5 North York GO	Oriole GO	Toronto 2 Union Station	Ar	Route Number Numéro du trajet	Zone→ Trip Number Numéro du parcours	Toronto 2 Union Station	Dp North York 5 North York GO	Thornhill 60 Langstaff GO	Richmond Hill 50 Richmond Hill GO	Richmond Hill 78 Richmond Hill GO	Richmond Hill 98 Richmond Hill GO	Bloomington GO	Ar
61D	61060			05 10	05 22	→	→	→	05 50		61	61261	09 25	→	→	09 52	10 10	10 25	10 40	
61	61070	05 15	05 23	05 37	05 49	→	→	→	06 20		61	61301	10 35	→	→	11 02	11 20	11 35	11 50	
	5006	06 02	06 08	06 18	06 24	06 32	06 36	07 05			61	61341	11 25	→	→	11 52	12 10	12 25	12 40	
	5008	07 02	07 08	07 18	07 24	07 32	07 36	08 05			61	61381	12 25	→	→	12 52	13 10	13 25	13 40	
	5010	08 02	08 08	08 18	08 24	08 32	08 36	09 05			61	61421	13 40	→	→	14 10	14 30	14 45	15 00	
61	61280	08 55	09 03	09 18	09 35	→	→	→	10 20		61	61441	14 40	→	→	15 20	15 45	16 00	16 15	
61	61320	09 55	10 03	10 18	10 33	→	→	→	11 10			5323	15 45	16 13	16 18	16 26	16 32	16 42	16 50	
61	61370	10 55	11 03	11 18	11 33	→	→	→	12 10			5325	16 45	17 13	17 18	17 26	17 32	17 42	17 50	
61	61400	12 10	12 18	12 33	12 48	→	→	→	13 25			5327	17 45	18 13	18 18	18 26	18 32	18 42	18 50	
61	61440	13 10	13 18	13 33	13 48	→	→	→	14 25			5329	18 45	19 13	19 18	19 26	19 32	19 42	19 50	
61	61490	13 55	14 05	14 20	14 35	→	→	→	15 15		61	61721	19 40	→	→	20 15	20 30	20 45	21 00	
											61	61771	20 45	→	→	21 10	21 25	21 40	21 55	
											61	61811	21 40	→	→	22 05	22 20	22 35	22 50	
											61	61841	22 40	→	→	23 05	23 20	23 35	23 50	
											61	61901	00 40	→	→	01 05	01 15	01 30	01 45	
											61	61961	02 40	→	→	03 05	03 15	03 30	03 40	

I reached out to GO Transit recently re: concerns with the reduced service and a representative simply said they were monitoring ridership but wouldn't commit to any improvements. I've since escalated my concerns to the CEO's Office.

In terms of **coverage**, the GO train appeals only to local residents who are travelling to downtown Toronto. Few get on at Richmond Hill and jump off at the next stop (Langstaff) or the first two Toronto stops (Old Cummer and Oriole). So, if you need to travel locally or regionally – or are concerned about traffic in these areas – the GO train and the hourly buses that run outside of the train's operating hours are not a viable option.

Additionally, if you work further north of the Eaton Centre at Yonge and Dundas, it probably isn't a convenient choice unless you are fine with an added TTC fare or a long walk.

And **cost**. At **\$6.86** per adult ride, the fare is and has always been pricey. You are paying a premium for a seamless ride to downtown Toronto.

As for that long promised all-day, two-way service, I have fears that once the TTC service is up and running at Langstaff, that will impact GO service since the TTC will provide superior frequency, coverage (through multiple stops) and operating hours (including weekends and holidays) and likely be cheaper.

I noticed with interest on Page 20 of the *YRT's Moving to 2025 – 2021-2025 Business Plan* that all-day, two way service is no longer mentioned for the Richmond Hill line and instead frequency "will be increased" (see excerpt below)

GO Expansion Program

Metrolinx is developing the GO Expansion Program on the Barrie, Stouffville and Richmond Hill GO rail lines serving York Region. The Barrie and Stouffville lines will be served with all-day, two-way service and train frequency on the Richmond Hill line will be increased. The 16 GO Stations within York Region are served by connecting bus and GO Shuttle routes. As the Regional Express Rail program is advanced, YRT will review the route network, service frequency and net cost per passenger of GO Station connecting services.

As Metrolinx hasn't hesitated to cut service during and as the pandemic has eased, it leaves the possibility that this could be done too once the Yonge North TTC stop is up and running.

With re: to the YRT, as noted earlier the Region has made its decision about where the greatest growth and potential lies: **Yonge Street**. The seamless, frequent North-South Viva bus service appeals to a larger mass all the way up to Newmarket and as a result, that's where expensive infrastructure was rolled out and where more dense residential and commercial projects are appropriate.

Meanwhile, no such investment has been made for the East-West flow on Major Mackenzie. Buses struggle with cars to keep to their schedules and riders must hop off and on to connect to popular routes on Yonge or Bayview.

Frequency is also poor and the only upgrade the YRT highlighted in its 2023 Transit Initiatives document was slightly improved service to the 25 Major Mackenzie Bus (from every 35 minutes to 26 minutes during rush hour – see following page).

Quick sidebar: It wasn't always that way. In the 80s when GO operated the bus route, riders could actually get on at Norfolk and Major Mackenzie Drive East and ride the bus all the way to Finch Station. This great, seamless service was discontinued when the YRT took over all bus service in York Region.

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Route Implementation Date:

- > September 2005
- > Restructured and renamed in June 2013

Proposed Service Changes:

- > Improve rush-hour frequency

Route Type/Routing:

- > Base
- > Operates Monday to Friday along Major Mackenzie Drive East between Yonge Street and Markham Stouffville Hospital

Major Trip Generators:

- > Alexander Mackenzie High School
- > Mackenzie Richmond Hill Hospital
- > Richmond Hill Central Library

- > Richmond Hill GO Station
- > Bayview Secondary School
- > SmartCentres Richmond Hill
- > Cachet Village
- > Angus Glen Community Centre
- > Markham Stouffville Hospital
- > Cornell Community Centre
- > Cornell Bus Terminal

Passenger Benefits/Impacts:

- > Morning rush hour frequency improved from the current 35 minutes to approximately every 26 minutes
- > Afternoon rush hour frequency improved from the current 35 minutes to approximately every 27 minutes

OPERATING PERIOD AND FREQUENCY IN MINUTES (September 2019 and September 2022):

	Early a.m.	Rush Hour a.m.	Midday	Rush Hour p.m.	Early Evening	Late Evening	Saturday	Sunday/Holiday
2019	43	43	61	33	58	n/a	n/a	n/a
2022	35	35	66	35	67	n/a	n/a	n/a

ROUTE PERFORMANCE (September 2019 and September 2021):

Performance Indicator	2019	2021	Performance Indicator	2019	2021		
Average ridership	Weekday daily	668	276	Net cost per passenger	Weekday rush hour	\$4.62	\$19.88
	Weekday rush hour	455	179		Weekday non-rush hour	\$11.92	\$27.85
	Weekday non-rush hour	213	107				
Average ridership per hour	Weekday rush hour	18	7	Revenue-to-cost ratio	Weekday rush hour	42%	15%
	Weekday non-rush hour	10	5		Weekday non-rush hour	22%	11%

Source: YRT 2023 Transit Initiatives – Page 27

Final thoughts

During the May 11, 2023 virtual meeting hosted by Councillor Cilevitz – which was also attended by Regional and Local Councillor Joe DiPaola – it was revealed that representatives of the developer had been working with city planners on their application over a period of months.

Considering this collaboration, it's very puzzling then why the proposal is wildly above so many existing by-laws, and why it didn't make an effort to connect with neighbourhood residents to share its vision and gain valuable input first before submitting its application.

At the meeting, residents were cautioned it was still early in the planning process – that the May 16, 2023 council meeting was just for information gathering and no decisions would be made that evening.

While I respect this guidance, I am skeptical about any modifications that will be made by the developer after the May 16 meeting. I provided excellent input and concerns about the size and scope and traffic impact of the condo that now lies at the corner of Major Mackenzie Drive and Essex and watched in the end where the height and FSI were only slightly reduced despite being well above the by-laws at the time.

One of the reasons for my concerns about the previous project were doubts that the nearby GO station or even YRT would be heavily used. Years later, GO riders on the line are no better off

even as the line has expanded north twice (first to Gormley and then Bloomington) while the YRT buses continue to be lightly used. Meanwhile, I've noticed modifications have been made to Essex to improve the traffic flow from the high-density project.

So, I think it's perfectly natural to be wary of the planning process in this proposal too. That said, I have found the level of detail and candor in concerns cited by the city's planning staff to be very encouraging. I hope it continues, and that both the planning department – and city council – closely review my concerns along with those of other neighbourhood residents who have provided some very valid concerns for further review.

As the Fall 2022-Winter 2023 myRichmond Hill newsletter highlighted recently, *Government works best when its citizens are engaged*. I think you'll see by the submissions received from residents – and the comments that are provided during the May 16, 2023 council meeting – there are many residents in the vicinity of this proposed high-density condo who truly care about their neighbourhood and community. I hope that results in an outcome everyone can celebrate.

Thanks for allowing me the opportunity to contribute to the process. I look forward to continuing to participate as I feel that's how great cities are built and last the test of time.

-Michael Theodores
Long-time Richmond Hill resident