

From: DAVID HESSEL
Sent: Monday, June 26, 2023 8:03 AM
To: Council Agenda <councilagenda@london.ca>
Cc:
Subject: [EXTERNAL] OZ-9565

Dear Mayor Morgan, Members of London City Council, Sonia (Planning & Development Department) and Tamara (Ontario Land Tribunal):

Please accept this e-mail as an expression of interest and concern related to File: OZ-9565. We would ask that this communication be submitted to the agenda for the review of this file, and that our concerns, positions, input, and suggestions be taken into consideration with respect to the proposed zoning changes and redevelopment at/near 755, 785, and 815 Wonderland Road South. Thank you in advance for doing so.

As longtime residents of London, including more than 15 years in Westmount at [REDACTED], our family has seen immense changes in the use of Westmount Shopping Centre. What used to be a lively and bustling retail core of our local community has fallen on hard times as the retail landscape and other amenities have changed and/or moved. It is sad to so many of us, but we recognize that nothing remains the same forever and that we must often adapt to new realities.

Having said that, we wonder why Westmount Shopping Centre has declined to the extent that it has. There does not seem to be any valid reason. We look at the population density in the immediate area of the mall, including many apartment buildings and townhouse complexes along Wonderland Road and within walking distance of the mall, and we can't understand why it should not continue to be a vital and vibrant hub of our community. With respect, we wonder about questionable operational decisions, the level of retail rents, and, quite frankly, a deliberate agenda on the part of the owner to create the current situation to demonstrate the 'needed proof' for the proposed redevelopment.

Moreover, we are concerned about the capacity of the three local schools and one day care centre along Viscount Road to accept the new students and children who would be living in the redevelopment. It makes no sense to us to create new housing, but then bus or otherwise transport those young people to schools and day care centres in other areas.

We recognize the desire of Kingsett Capital and McCor Management to reimagine potential, redevelop the mall, and hopefully revitalize it by doing so. We also understand completely the national need in Canada to build more housing for our growing population, including the increased numbers in our own city. Therefore, we acknowledge the initiative from Kingsett and McCor to move forward with some type of redevelopment, regardless of how we got here.

Our overriding concern, however, is with the size and scale of the proposed redevelopment and its huge impact both on our local community and our city generally, not only during construction but also after. Specifically, we would request consideration of the following:

1. the lack, to date, of any well-publicized and meaningful public meeting at which citizens could learn details of the plans, ask questions, express concerns, and provide input.

2. the increased traffic congestion in the area, especially on Wonderland Road South.
3. the negative impact to the immediate neighbourhood of construction vehicles, dust, debris, and noise pollution.
4. the length of time such a huge project would take to finish.
5. the impact on the students and staffs of three schools and daycare centre right across Viscount Road.
6. the potential decrease in property values of nearby homes.
7. the possible damage to property in the immediate area from pile driving and the use of large machinery.

In addition, we are deeply concerned about the messages which the developer has clearly sent by virtue of an appeal to the Ontario Land Tribunal at this stage in the process:

that the developer has shown an unwillingness to respect the process and the authority of London City Council, the duly elected representatives of the people.

1. that the developer has clearly indicated an unwillingness to respect specific provisions of The London Plan (London's Official Plan) by proposing buildings which are far too high, and which contain far too much office space, deliberately violating terms of The London Plan.
2. that the developer seems intent on luring office renters from other parts of the city, including the downtown, and seems likely to do so by offering 'sweetheart deals', at least in the short term.
3. that the developer, by attracting office renters from the downtown, will immensely hurt businesses and residents in that part of our city, a part which needs so many more businesses and residents.
4. that the developer is not local, and as such has no vested interest in this project other than financial.

Please understand that we are not opposed to development, especially the creation of more housing. After all, every one of us lives in something which somebody has developed, and we are grateful for that. Our concerns are focused on the size of the project, the potential zoning changes necessary to permit development of such scale, the negative impact on our immediate community during construction and our entire community long-term, the current tactics of the developer to steamroll this project by any means available, and the obligations of the developer to respect the needs of us who currently live, learn, work, and play here.

To that end, and in the spirit of collaboration and cooperation, we would suggest the following to all of us who are stakeholders:

that a well-planned and well-publicized meeting be held, a meeting open to all residents of Westmount, to share information, planning issues, timelines, questions, and concerns.

1. that any zoning change prioritize the needs of the current community and respect the provisions of The London Plan.
2. that the developer commits to keeping construction traffic off Village Green Avenue, Woodcrest Boulevard, Viscount Road, and all other residential streets.
3. that the developer refrain from noise and dust-creation work on evenings, nights, weekends, and holidays.
4. that the developer consult with the Thames Valley Board of Education and/or the local schools on Viscount around enrolment capacity, as well as respect the wishes of school officials around examination days, track & field events, and any other special activities which would be hindered by nearby construction.
5. that a 'Collaboration Committee' be created which would include one or two members of City Council, a member of the City's Planning Department, one or two representatives of the developer, and two or three local citizens to meet and/or communicate regularly during construction, to share ongoing concerns, and continually seek ways to work together in everyone's best interests.
6. that in all decision-making with respect to zoning and any other aspects of this potential development, that the vision of the initial developer (Sifton) be kept front-of-mind and honoured as much as possible, i.e., to rebuild Westmount Shopping Centre as a vital and vibrant hub to serve the community of Westmount.

Sifton developed Westmount Mall as part of a visionary community more than 50 years ago. Sifton owners, management, and employees were our neighbours, colleagues, and friends. They still are! That is the kind of developer and development that we want and need. We can do much better than what is currently on the table. We must do much better. London and Londoners deserve it. Please make your decisions accordingly.

Thank you again for accepting this input. We look forward to feedback as appropriate.

Sincerely,

David Hessel