

## MZO for 900-unit development in Beeton gains Council's approval

Council approved a Minister Zoning Order (MZO) application from Flato Developments for a project in Beeton last Monday, with conditions attached to meet the Town's planning goals.

The conditions include the provision of affordable or attainable housing for seniors, as the development includes 400 units of seniors' rental apartments, in addition to 173 street townhouses, 40 semi-detached units and 297 single detached homes.

The motion to support the MZO was approved 7-3 at last Monday's Council meeting and will now be reviewed by the County of Simcoe before reaching the Province.

However, some Councillors had concerns around the municipality's authority over Flato's MZO application, as the Province does not issue conditional approvals.

"You can market this stuff and you can sell it with whatever jargon you want to call it, you can call it affordable, attainable, achievable," said Ward 2 Councillor Michael Beattie.

"I think we have much better bang for our buck building 100 seniors housing units ourselves versus signing onto 1,000 units with only 100 as affordable. Instead we endorsed the developers plan, whatever that may be, and when asked for conditions the only condition we seem to be offering is asking them to make a commitment [for affordable seniors housing]," he said.

Beattie added that his comment isn't a slight towards developers.

"I believe Flato and many of the people we do business with and have done business with over the years are reputable people who build fine products and they do great philanthropic work in the communities that they build in," he noted.

"Where I really have to dissent on is the process by which this issue has come before us."

Beattie called the MZO process an "end run on municipal councils like ourselves and their ability to be autonomous and accountable to the public."

"This process eliminates [public input] all together and I don't know how anyone can be okay with that. We try so hard to get people engaged in their community and engaged in the issues they face, with often lacklustre results because people lead busy lives," he explained.

Executive Director for the Simcoe County Greenbelt Coalition, Margaret Prophet, said in addition to eliminating proper public consultations, MZOs don't allow for in-depth studies regarding agricultural impact, environmental impact and archeology.

Instead, there's two- to three-page reports on the issues, lacking the level of detail and community concern reflected in the regular studies, she noted.

"It virtually eliminates any kind of appeal process as well, so it really truncates the process, but at a great extent," Prophet noted.

She told The Times the County of Simcoe has seen a significant increase in developers filing for MZOs across its municipalities.

MZOs replace municipalities' official plan amendment, so they're left with site planning, site maintenance, bylaws, and permits to control what's built.

Prophet noted MZOs circumvent a lot of the Town's planning processes.

"Why would developers wait to go through the proper process? What benefit is it to them to prove to the community [the development should be built], and to work with the municipal government in the way that the process is currently set up when they can just jump to the front of the line," she said.

Prophet said the Province has made very clear that the municipality's job is to properly consult with constituents to make sure their planning goals align with the best interest of the community, which isn't happening with MZOs.

"What we're seeing in New Tecumseth and more broadly is that staff reports aren't being done and the consultation is a joke," she noted. "Sometimes the MZO application is approved the same night it's on the agenda, so we're asking the Province to not permit anymore MZO applications in Simcoe County until they can really figure out how to make sure the projects that get jumped to the front of the queue, actually get the proper investigation."

By Sam Odrowski Local Journalism Initiative Reporter