

City, neighbours at odds over apartments

Intensification on trial in fight over tower on Industrial

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OTTAWA - Community opposition to a zoning change that would allow a nine-storey building in a transforming industrial area is typical of the challenges the city faces when trying to implement its drive to densify, a city planner and the councillor for the area say.

A building at Industrial Avenue and Neighbourhood Way is being proposed by Claridge Homes, and there has been a flurry of opposition to it from people living close by, despite existing zoning that would allow a large commercial operation on the site.

People have cited privacy, shade, traffic, parking, falling property values, pollution, and crime concerns as reasons the city should deny the rezoning request.

Public consultations have drawn comments that the building is too high, there are enough rental units in the area already, it means a loss of green space, and it is a threat to pedestrian safety, among others.

"These are the types of concerns you get on any intensification project," said the municipality's manager of development approvals, Grant Lindsay, who is recommending city council grant the rezoning request.

"Any time you have a new development in an existing community, there will be opposition."

Alta Vista Councillor Peter Hume said the challenge to municipal leaders who want to succeed in changing the face of the city is to show people why intensification is good.

"It's about leadership," he said.

"Communities will work against change if they don't see the point. So we will have to lead them through an intensification phase."

The drive to intensify cities is worldwide, and the principle forms a central part of Ottawa's official plan to direct and control growth.

The idea is to create more compact districts where people work, live and play in the same areas, served by public transportation links, instead of creating more urban sprawl served by roads.



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Planning experts say the former is far cheaper because it relies on existing city services to accommodate growth, it's more environmentally and socially sustainable and it's cheaper for individuals in the long run.

Mr. Lindsay and Mr. Hume say what's happening on Industrial Avenue is an example of what needs to be achieved citywide.

The area once was dominated by warehouses and commercial and industrial buildings with little residential building and even less in the way of residential support -- things such as grocery stores or even sidewalks.

A few years ago, the city designated the area a "multi-use" zone and opened development up to offices, retail stores, and residential redevelopment. A big-box mall has gone in and other retail stores have opened or are slated to open. Scads of office space is planned. It has good transit connections.

Mr. Hume says if residential intensification isn't appropriate for this area, it's not appropriate anywhere.

"This is the start of a transformation of an area from something to something much better," he said. "This area could be a model for intensification projects."

Mr. Hume has attended open houses on the rezoning plan for the building, and he says he's sympathetic to the concerns of people who live in the area and don't want the building. But he said he has explained to many that a large commercial enterprise or a Tim Hortons franchise could be approved under the existing zoning, and that he has tried to educate them on what the city is trying to do in the area and why.

He said often when people understand the goals and limits on the city's ability to control what happens on privately held land, their opposition fades.

"When it's explained, people tend to see the point," he said. "Our challenge as a city is to make people see the point. If they still disagree, they still disagree, but it's our job to make sure people are informed."

The rezoning request will be before the planning committee next week.

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