

Sharon Estok

January 27, 2024

Mr. James Van Rooi
Senior Planner
City of Hamilton
Planning and Economic Development Dept.
71 Main Street West
Hamilton, Ontario
L8P 4Y5

RE: Application File # UHHOPA – 24-001 and ZAC – 24 – 004

Dear Mr. Van Rooi:

As a resident of the Glen Echo neighbourhood, I am writing to urge you to recommend against the above re-zoning applications, for the following reasons:

Scale

Although the concept design appears to have changed from the one presented by the developers at their June 1/2023 public information session, it remains totally inappropriate for the site, which is a low-density neighbourhood of predominantly single-family homes.

8 stories is too high, and 264 units is too many for a 3 acre property. There is not enough clearance space between the building and the children's playground, the baseball diamond, the basketball court and the highschool.

This type of development is more suited to a major thoroughfare, not a 20 foot wide street with driveways and stop signs and children walking and being driven to school and daycare.

The only reasonable residential use of this property would a medium density development, perhaps 20-30 townhouses or condos of two stories.

Traffic and Parking

The streets in this neighbourhood are already congested due to the two over-crowded schools in Glendale Park, without an additional 264 units of people with cars dodging kids with backpacks or parents with strollers, trying to zip in and out of an underground parking garage. On many occasions, I've been late for work because it's taken me up to 10 minutes just to get out of my driveway during school drop-off times. Many of the streets are also hazardous, particularly in winter, when both residents and teachers park their cars all day or even overnight against the current By-Law.

A development of this kind would create an unnecessary safety hazard for existing residents as well as the residents of the proposed development, and would necessitate additional taxpayer resources being deployed towards traffic control and parking By-law officers.

Water, Electrical and Sewer Infrastructure

There does not appear to be an adequate plan for waste or stormwater overflow. The June 1/2023 information meeting displayed posters indicating this would be stored either “underground” or in “ponds”.

If it’s to be underground, I would caution you that this area is already prone to flooding due to runoff from the Red Hill Valley Expressway and inadequate City sewer infrastructure. My basement has been flooded twice already due to this issue, and my insurance company removed my coverage for water damage, forcing me to purchase an additional policy from a second insurer. This problem is likely to get worse in the coming years due to climate change (University of Waterloo, Intact Centre for Climate Adaptation). Unless the City can afford to update all the sewers within a 5km radius, underground storage is not the answer.

If the solution is to use ponds, I have no idea where these could be located. There is already a water overflow pond constructed a couple of years ago between Viola Desmond and Glendale Secondary schools, which is fenced off and removed a large area of park formerly available to the community. This was built purportedly to handle water from Viola Desmond, but perhaps this is the pond referred to in the poster. If so, it’s already in a bad location, potentially exposing children at recess or teenagers playing football from the adjacent schools to smelly sewage or mosquito infested standing water.

I’m also concerned about the ability of current infrastructure to provide enough water for residents of the area, both old and new, after the construction of an 8-story tower. Recently the City approved the conversion of a single-family home next door to mine, into a duplex. There are now 12 people living in that property and water pressure in my home has been severely reduced. You can only imagine what the result would be for water usage with the addition of another 600 or so people to the neighbourhood.

In the current situation where the Provincial government has reduced the ability of Municipalities to charge appropriate infrastructure fees to developers, I’m concerned that the City of Hamilton will not be able to afford the true cost of servicing a development of this magnitude to an adequate degree and that the lack of acceptable water, sewage and electrical services will negatively affect anyone’s desire to live in the area, existing residents or new ones.

Green Space

I believe the City’s Official Plan acknowledges that the East End of Hamilton does not currently have the recommended amount of green for the number of residents, and this proposed development would not only add additional residents to that mix, but remove mature trees and open park space.

With the potential construction of stormwater ponds, this space will be even further reduced.

It is unclear, from the latest drawings I’ve seen, where the proposed underground parking garage is to be located. It appears to me that it will extend all the way from Glen Echo Drive to Rainbow Dr. If this is true, we residents are unaware that the developers own that land. Has the City sold them additional property beyond what they bought from the School Board?

If this the case, and the parking garage extends to Rainbow Dr., will this result in further reduction of green space in Glendale Park, or is there some plan to eventually replace grass and playground structures, etc.? What are local residents expected to do for passive recreation during what will be a lengthy construction period?

The developer's information meeting of June 1, 2023 did mention potential recreation improvements to be made, but it wasn't clear whether they were going to make them, or expected the City to foot the bill for this as well. I also noted they were touting the area as having ample recreation space due to the proximity of the Red Hill Valley trail as a place to enjoy the outdoors. I found it insulting that they would suggest that a good alternative to the clean and peaceful space that many children currently enjoy in Glendale park, would be a filthy trail, full of garbage, infested with rats, near a polluted creek, with an expressway overhead spewing toxic exhaust fumes and homeless drug addicts camping out.

Schools

When Glen Echo and Glen Brae schools were closed, Viola Desmond was supposed to take in the children from both. However, in its first year HWDSB had to install portables because there was not enough space. More were added the second year. This school is already overcrowded and adding 264 new tenants, presumably some with children, will be a problem.

I recognize that this is not within the City's control, but I'm not sure how the School Board could tell those people their children have to leave the area to attend school.

Process

My neighbours and I remain angry and frustrated with the process that brought us to this point and the failure of both the HWDSB and the City Council to keep us abreast of plans for the Glen Echo School property in what appears to have been an attempt to deceive and manipulate us.

When plans to close Glen Brae School were made public, only parents of the students attending were given notice of a public meeting to discuss them. Nothing was sent to homeowners whose properties were nearby. If you didn't have a child enrolled at that school, you wouldn't have known a thing. Fortunately, a few of us got wind of it and we attended. The person running that information session was a junior staff member who couldn't really answer many questions. No trustees or senior planners bothered to show up. What she did say was that Glen Echo would also be closing and when we asked what would happen to the property she said it would be sold, but that consideration would be given as to what would end up on the site and that there would be public meetings.

School Boards are required to offer surplus properties first to the City and if they don't purchase them, the next priority would be to offer them for other public or non-profit agencies such as rec centres or nursing homes.

We nearby residents waited through a prolonged period of demolition of Glen Brae and construction of Viola Davis, during which time our neighbourhood was filled with noisy trucks, streets with holes dug in them, dust blowing everywhere and cracked sidewalks. My own front yard was dug up, filled in and re-sodded, not once but twice, as the contractors attempted to find a water main. My lawn has still not recovered after at least two years.

But we never heard anything about the sale of Glen Echo, or any public meetings on the topic, and believe me, we were all looking for that information. What a surprise then to see out of the blue, surveyors from Losani homes turning up.

As it turns out, HWDSB offered the property to the City of Hamilton, and the councilor representing this ward passed on the offer to purchase and convert it to a park, because “nobody from the neighbourhood called him about it or registered any complaints”. First of all, nobody in the neighbourhood knew, but more importantly, it is not the citizen’s job to notify the councilor of things going on in their ward, but the other way around. We remain disappointed and disheartened that this councilor failed in their duty to consult with ward residents about this issue.

After the City turned down the property, we’ve no idea whether it was offered to any other public users. What we do know is that the sale to Losani took place during the municipal election, when current School Board trustees were pre-occupied with their campaigns, and before any newly elected trustees had any whiff of it. Was this timing coincidence? Or a deliberate attempt to hide what, surely, they must have known would be an unpopular plan. We continue to question the need to close Glen Echo School in the first place, considering that Viola Davis is now so over-crowded. We suspect that financial mismanagement over many years left them with a need to generate as much money as they could by deliberately obscuring their plans to sell to a private developer all along.

Then again, there could have been collusion between the School Board and the City, with private interests lobbying both to purchase this land. Why else would Losani homes pay \$6.7 million dollars for a 3 acre piece of property currently zoned as public use/park, unless it had some kind of information or assurance that a high density residential facility would be approved?

In Summary

I urge you to visit the proposed site of these applications before submitting your report. I feel that would make it pretty clear that this could never be considered an appropriate development. This high density project is completely inconsistent with any responsible urban planning design, and would recklessly endanger all area residents, including those new tenants, while deflating property standards and values.

Again, a scaled down, medium density townhouse/condo complex of 20-30 two-story buildings would be a solution.

Perhaps there is another solution that can be found by the City, to swap this land with Losani for another equivalent parcel of green space in another neighbourhood, which has perhaps more than its fair share, and let East Hamilton residents keep what little we have.

In short, neither City of Hamilton, nor HWDSB infrastructure is equipped to handle this type of development: not roads, not sewers, not water or electrical supply, not schools and not green space.

Sincerely,

Sharon Estok