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## NEWS LOCAL

# Timmins developer planning 100 new apartments

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Artists rendering of the three-building 100-unit apartment complex proposed for Commercial Avenue at Preston Street, the site of the former Lionel Gauthier public school.(PHOTO SUPPLIED)

By **LEN GILLIS**

[len.gillis@sunmedia.ca](mailto:len.gillis@sunmedia.ca)

Timmins city council is being asked to amend the city zoning bylaw to allow for the creation of three apartment buildings on Commercial Avenue at Preston Street, on the site of the old Lionel Gauthier public school.

The application was discussed Monday night when a Timmins developer outlined plans for the three buildings that will create 100 new apartment units. As the project was presented to council, there were some concerns expressed by neighbours and by some city council members, especially about the number of available parking spots.

The project proposes to renovate the old school for one apartment building and then build two brand new buildings in the area that was once a schoolyard.

The plan is have a two-storey building with 28 units. The other two buildings are planned to be four-storey buildings; one with 32 units and another with 40 units, according to documents presented to city council Monday.

The development is being put forward by 2330104 Ontario Inc., represented by businessman Pete Beaucage Jr., the same man who developed the old GV hotel into a new 34-unit apartment building, which opened earlier this year.

City planning manager Cindy Walsh said the application before the city is seeking several exemptions to the minimum standards in the zoning bylaw to allow for less parking, to change the setback distance from the road for the front and rear yards, as well as a reduction in landscaping requirements.

“These will be addressed in the staff report that comes forward to council after tonight’s public meeting,” said Walsh. She said the report would be ready within two to three weeks.

Walsh added that her department so far has received three letters of objection, that will be included as part of the staff report. She said those letters are concerned mainly with parking.

### **WHY SEEK EXEMPTIONS?**

Councillor Pat Bamford said Timmins certainly needs more housing, but he questioned why the developer would be seeking exemptions or changes to the standards.

“To immediately begin reducing our standards for parking, setback and landscaping when those standards were put in place after a great deal of review and study, that they’re put in place for the protection of neighbours,” said Bamford. He said he wasn’t sure this was the right approach.

“My first reaction is to be very cautious about looking at reducing our minimum standards, and that’s what is being requested here. You know I am open to ideas and explanations why that is the case, but at first blush I think we really have to, with new construction, maintain our standards,” said Bamford.

Councillor Mike Doody said he agreed with Bamford’s comments and said the city has to be cautious about how far to go in reducing standards. Doody also commented that there is a concern that the new development would reduce nearby parking for some of the neighbours. Doody said he hopes the issue is addressed by the planning department and that the developer and the neighbours can reach some sort of accommodation.

Concern was also expressed by councillor Joe Campbell who said he wants to see a detailed site plan before he goes any further. Campbell said the several requests for change would have the effect of nullifying the zoning bylaw.

“I think we’re going down a dangerous road here,” said Campbell. He added that the concerns of neighbours need to be addressed, especially since 100 units will add a significant number of new people to the neighbourhood.

“I’d like to see a site plan before I could go either way on this thing,” he added.

Concern about parking was expressed by councillor Noella Rinaldo, who she was pleased to see new residential development, especially with the school being renovated.

“I like to be flexible because we do need the buildings. I think they will be a

wonderful addition with the school being re-purposed. But I am concerned about the parking,” said Rinaldo.

Mayor Steve Black said council was seeing the application for the first time, and that no decision was being made by council until a full staff report is submitted.

Persons and groups are allowed to make oral or written submissions to city council before the amendment to the zoning bylaw is passed, which is likely to take at least three weeks.

Mayor Black asked developer Beaucage if he wanted to add anything to the discussion.

## **PARKING IS A CONCERN**

“I understand the concerns with the parking. The current situation right now is there are some neighbouring homes that park on my property,” he explained. Beaucage said he has been lenient with the situation so far. He said some neighbours have been parking on the Preston side of the property for years, but that will have to change when the lot of developed.

“The only concern I have is that when I develop the site, where are they going to park. Well it’s not really my problem, I guess,” Beaucage told council.

He added that many buildings in Timmins already have less parking than is outlined in the zoning bylaw. Beaucage said he didn’t think he was asking for anything out of the ordinary.

In response to questions from Councillor Rick Dubeau, Beaucage revealed that his plan was to have 89 parking spaces for 100 units.

Robert Barrette, a longtime resident at 214 Commercial Avenue outlined his concern, and said that the proposed parking for the development is not enough. Barrette said to his knowledge, the parking standard is set at 1.2 spaces per apartment unit, meaning that the new development should have 120 spaces.

Barrette added that most families have more than one vehicle and that should be taken into consideration. Barrette said there should be a minimum of one parking spot per apartment unit. He said even then, it doesn’t take into account visitors’ parking.

Barrette said if there is not enough parking within the new apartment property, then residents and visitors will park along the street. He said that will have the effect on blocking Commercial Avenue.

Barrette said his other concern is that the plan does not seem to have enough green-space, especially considering that with the school being shut down, there is no longer a playground in the neighbourhood. He said a 100-unit apartment project is sure to have children, and they will need a place to play.

“They need some type of an area around there to keep kids busy and keep them off the street,” said Barrette.

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