



STAFF PHOTOS/JIM MASON

The owners of the Hoover Park Drive big box centre want the freedom to have smaller stores, they told town council.

Developer 'showing lack of respect for downtown,' councillor tells meeting

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well as prohibiting the construction of medical and dental clinics. Originally, the BIA was in support of the motion as it set a minimum size for stores in the plaza, which limited potential competition from smaller stores.

The proposed amendment calls for a removal of all previous restrictions including allowing stores of any size to be constructed.

Several other business owners attended the meeting and expressed their concerns as well, including Charlotte Cave, who runs Chic Thrills, Hubba Hubba and The Girls near Main and Church streets.

She said if the amendments were approved, "why wouldn't (she) consider" moving her three businesses to the plaza as she says they have "the whole market covered".

Following her comment, Councillor Clyde Smith questioned Mr. Clarkson and Mr. Annand about their statements regarding the plaza attracting 900-per cent more traffic flow since its opening.

"I'm finding this is not making any sense," he said. "If (more business and interest) is the case, why do you need to loosen the restrictions? If so many retailers are looking to come to Stouffville, why do we need to reduce the store size to smaller than 5,000 square feet?"

If Ms Cave would consider relocating if smaller stores were allowed, the move would further hurt the downtown core.

David Barthau, owner of Barthau Jewellers, didn't support smaller stores being allowed in the plaza.

"I believe with the way the price of gas is going, it'll keep people shopping locally, at least I hope they will," he said.

Mr. Annanda referred to the 60,000-square-foot allotted section for the smaller stores as "only 12.5 per cent" of the total possible retail space available.

That did not sit well with Mr. Smith, who was visibly upset by the comment.

"You're showing a total lack of respect for our downtown core," he said. "You say it's only 60,000 square feet? Our entire downtown core is 80,000 square feet. If we relax on our restrictions, you'll suck the business from the downtown core."

His response to Mr. Annand's "modest change" garnered applause from the business owners sitting in the audience.

Mr. Clarkson said other SmartCentres are developing at a faster rate as they have "little to no restrictions" and are able to construct stores of any size.

Mayor Wayne Emmerson expressed his concern.

"We (Whitchurch-Stouffville) haven't got the population everyone thinks we have," he said, adding he didn't believe the town could sustain the downtown core and dozens of smaller stores in the Wal-Mart plaza.

"We've sunk a lot of taxpayers dollars into that downtown," he said.

"I do think its an asset to have Wal-Mart, Canadian Tire and Rona, They're essential to a community that has everything, but we also need a vibrant downtown."

Councillor Phil Bannon assured business owners council was behind them.

"We want you to feel confident that your dollars are being invested wisely and that we fully support you."

Mr. Emmerson suggested to the two men to do "more work" for the proposal and try to work with the BIA.

In the end, council voted to only accept the presentation and bring it back to council in August.

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