

Community at odds over sidewalk

BY SANDRA BOLAN
sbolan@yrmg.com

Double, and even triple check anything and everything about a home you are interested in purchasing, or you might end up with a sidewalk abutting your property.

That is what may be in store for Sachin Patel and Marnie Sigmar, who purchased homes in Stouffville's southwest section 10 years apart.

When Ms Sigmar bought her Katherine Crescent home she was told there would be no development behind her.

Two years later, construction on a subdivision got underway.

Mr. Patel bought one of those new homes right behind Ms Sigmar last December.

"The look and feel of our property shrunk in a hurry," she said.

Mr. Patel paid an additional \$45,000 for a larger lot and because one of his neighbours is greenspace.

Now, that greenspace may be interrupted by a sidewalk that will also run beside Ms Sigmar's home, thereby, connecting Greenforest Grove with Katherine Crescent.

"Nobody wants to live beside a walkway," Mr. Patel said.

"It ruins the look of the property," Ms Sigmar said.

"Whether you look at the crime rates in Stouffville or not, it's a perceived risk," Ms Sigmar said, adding a real estate agent told her, if constructed, the sidewalk would lower her property value by 20 to 30 per cent.

Prior to buying his home, Mr. Patel said he did everything right. He went to the town's engineering department and was told there would be nothing between his home and the greenspace. Fieldgate representatives assured him of the same thing.

When he moved in with his wife and three girls, under the age of six, this summer, there was a sidewalk in front of their home.

He spoke to someone at the town again and was told there would be no sidewalk adjoining that one, which is curved toward the side of his home.

Ms Sigmar first heard of the potential walkway going beside her house from a neighbour about a year ago. She called the town and was told although there was an easement for it, there was no intention to build it.

FRONT PAGE: Neighbours Sachin and Hema Patel (from left) and Marnie Sigmar are disappointed a sidewalk is being added near their homes.



STAFF PHOTO/STEVE SOMERVILLE

A planned walkway had always been included in subdivision plans and marketing materials, according to builder Fieldgate Developments, but some residents aren't happy.

Approximately seven months ago, Ms Sigmar saw Fieldgate reps sizing up the proposed walkway site.

Stakes outlining its path were subsequently put into the ground.

Ms Sigmar called the town and was told, again, there would be no walkway.

Then on Sept. 9, residents in the area received a notice from Fieldgate Developments regarding a community information meeting on the sidewalk connecting the Hoover Thirty development to Katherine Crescent.

"Please note that while some neighbours have been urging us to install the walkway

to allow for connectivity in the community, others have expressed reluctance," stated the notice sent to residents.

Among those who object to the walkway are residents in 40 of Katherine Crescent's 42 homes, who signed a petition, according to Christina Filtsos.

"That's just an odd place for a walkway," she said.

It's odd because there is no sidewalk on Katherine Crescent, therefore, pedestrians from Greenforest Grove would be forced onto the street to continue their journey.

Councillor Rob Hargrave, whose Ward 6 encompasses both neighbourhoods, admit-

ted this is a safety concern.

He also said the walkway has been a part of both subdivision agreements and that connectivity is part of the municipality's official plan.

In 1995, town council approved the Katherine Crescent subdivision. In 2012, council gave the go-ahead to the Hoover Thirty development. Both subdivision approvals included the walkway.

Rick Mangotich, vice president at Fieldgate Developments, explained the approvals even further in an e-mail to The Sun-Tribune that stated, in part, when Hoover Thirty was approved "it included a requirement that the pathway be built as part of our subdivision works".

"The walkway is clearly and consistently shown in the approved engineering and landscaping drawings for our subdivision and on marketing materials used by the builders," Mr. Mangotich told The Sun-Tribune in an e-mail.

Both subdivision plans, obtained by The Sun-Tribune from Maria Schembri, the town's spokesperson, indicate the walkway's location.

If this publication was able to easily get this material, then why were two separate residents, years apart, not provided accurate information?

That is something no one can answer.

But to ensure this does not happen to you, Gallo real estate agent Lesley O'Connor suggested home buyers listen to what their agent and lawyer tells them before signing on the dotted line, then obtain that information for themselves — in particular data pertaining to potential development in the area — to avoid a case of so-called broken telephone.

And when it comes to town-specific issues, such as development, deal with the matter in person, obtain copies of plans and record conversation dates and names of those you spoke with.

"If it's something that really matters to you, check it out first-hand," Ms O'Connor said.

Without proof of what Mr. Patel and Ms Sigmar were told and by which town staff member(s), Ms O'Connor said they likely have no recourse at this point, if the sidewalk is constructed.

The matter is expected to go before council Dec. 3.

"There are some options being presented to council," Ms Schembri said.

"Things are put into subdivision agreements that can change," Mr. Hargrave said.



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