

Average price for 'affordable housing' in Aurora stands at \$460,000

By Brock Weir

Aurora could see further chances for affordable housing in the near future, but just what does 'affordable' actually mean? That was the question on some Councillors' minds last week, and they were not pleased with the answer.

Council considered a report outlining housing in Aurora. Its objective, according to Marco Ramunno, the Town's Director of Planning, is to chart the 'interrelationship' between employment and housing, and their impacts on the local economy.

According to the Region of York, 'affordable' means being able to purchase a house where annual living costs do not exceed 30 per cent of gross annual income for 'low and moderate income households', where the 'purchase price is at least 10 per cent below the average purchase price of resale units in the general market area,' and similar criteria for rental costs.

Taking current demographics into account, however, Aurora's threshold for what 'affordable' means is boiled down to \$461,455.

'York Region has undertaken extensive research on what constitutes affordable housing and has benchmarked two different types of thresholds, for ownership and for renting,' said Mr. Ramunno. 'The Region-wide affordable rent threshold for 2013 was \$1,252 per month, while the 2013 affordable ownership threshold specific to Aurora is \$461,455. This ownership threshold is the upper limits of what is considered 'affordable' and Aurora happens to have the highest average of any municipality in the Region.'

Conversely, Aurora also has higher than average home resale prices. A home which once re-sold at \$500,000 in 2010 now goes for approximately \$650,000, Mr. Ramunno noted, with single detached units often rising to approximately \$785,000 over the last five years.

'There have been some recent successes in Aurora towards affordability, and allowing both young and old residents to stay in Aurora,' said Mr. Ramunno. 'There has been a shift over the last 15 years to a more compact housing mix with 41 per cent of units built between 2009 and 2013 being rows, apartments or secondary units. Rows and apartments cost approximately 40 per cent less than a single detached unit.'

'Aurora is one of only two municipalities in York Region within which no new Regionally-funded affordable housing units have been built over the last 10 to 15 years. However, Aurora has had dialogue with the Region on such an initiative and should continue to work towards a made-in-Aurora project.'

Those talks continued as late as last week, according to Aurora CAO Neil Garbe, who told Council he and Mayor Geoff Dawe recently met with the Region's Commissioner of Social and Health Services about a potential opportunity coming up in Aurora.

For some Councillors, however, there needs to be more of a concerted effort to bring more affordable housing opportunities to the area. Councillor Jeff Thom, for instance, was clear he believed the \$461,000 might not seem 'affordable' to those in the affordable housing market.

'I would be shocked if most people would consider that affordable,' said Councillor Thom. 'I think if [the Region's] metrics are based on that being affordable, then their metrics might not be an accurate reflection of the types of affordable housing there are in the Town of Aurora.'

These metrics are, in part, derived out of stats from the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, noted Mayor Dawe, while Mr. Ramunno added a benchmark is housing costs should not exceed 35 per cent of a family's gross annual household income.

'We're above the Regional average, and incomes are higher for Aurora as well,' said Councillor Michael Thompson. 'I am not criticising [but] if this is what the upper threshold is for affordable housing and we're deriving policies from that, I think most people

would agree that \$461,000 is a definition for affordable housing.?