

Council shifts gears on townhouse development

By Brock Weir

A plan to knock down three homes on Metcalfe Street to make way for a 15-unit townhouse development on three lots was knocked back by Council this week.

Last Tuesday, Council, sitting at the Committee level, agreed to accept a zoning bylaw application from developers looking to purchase 103, 107 and 111 Metcalfe Streets with an eye to building 15 townhouse units sharing a condominium road.

But, when it came down to a final vote on Tuesday night, Council voted down the recommendation.

Had it been ratified, the application for a zoning bylaw amendment could have started proceeding through the normal planning channels and approvals and allow the applicant to purchase the properties in question.

It is a proposal that has been making its way through Town Hall for over the year and has been subject to some revisions following concerns raised by neighbours, but by the originally-proposed plan for 24 stacked townhouses was presented last week, it had been adjusted down to a 15 unit development of single dwellings.

“The rationale to accept the Zoning Bylaw Amendment application is that the proposal is an infill residential development within the Stable Residential designation and conforms to our use of the Official Plan,” said Heritage Planner Jeff Healey in his report to Council.

“Upon submission of a new complete zoning bylaw amendment application, staff will undertake a review of built form and compatibility of the proposed development to determine conformity to all policies [in the] Official Plan.”

Appearing at last week's meeting on the developer's behalf was John Beresford, who outlined the changes, and highlighted the need for this application to be approved before the land could change hands.

“At the time, the stacked townhouses could not comply with the maximum height limit in the Official Plan and would have required an official plan amendment,” he said. “This is one of the things the Committee members expressed concern. It is now a completely new proposal of three conventional townhouses. Three lots are for sale and my client has made an offer to purchase the three lots.”

Asked by Councillor Mrakas why, in a stable neighbourhood, the developer couldn't just build three homes on the three lots, the representative replied, “If he gets approval to proceed with the rezoning application, he will close on the sale, but in today's real estate market people want what they can get for their properties and that is virtually impossible with just three [houses].”

Following the delegations, Council members got down to business.

Councillor Michael Thompson, for instance, said that with the recent changes at the provincial level phasing out the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB), he was satisfied with the application as Aurora will have more agency to determine the final planning outcome.

Although he agreed with the Councillor to a certain extent, Councillor Mrakas said he was still cautious as the final governance details were yet to be finalized.

“I am against what is being proposed,” he said. “I think it would set a precedent within our stable neighbourhoods, so without [that] finalised I will still be opposed to it.”

Councillor John Abel, on the other hand, was more on the fence. While Metcalfe Street is outside the specific stable neighbourhoods recently outlined in Aurora's approved Interim Control Bylaw, he said he still had concerns over massing on the property.

“If you're taking away three houses and massing 14 or 15 townhouses that is a significant change,” he said. “I think that is exactly what the moratorium was speaking to. I am hesitant understanding everything that is coming forward. On the surface, I am all for applications coming forward for intensification, but I am also very respectful of the stable neighbourhoods, especially in our heritage area. I am not comfortable at this time to be in favour of it.”

But, in Mayor Geoff Dawe's view, all these concerns can be addressed once the formal application makes its way through the system.

“All we're doing is authorizing staff to accept the application,” said Mayor Dawe. “We're not approving anything else. It then goes through the public planning process, which is where we had these discussions where we invite members of the community to come and give us their thoughts, and that is where, in my opinion, it is properly handled.”