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FRONT PORCH PERSPECTIVE: Stable Neighbourhood Study

By Stephen Somerville

Last week in the mail our family received a form letter from the Town of Aurora.
The document was a Notice of Public Open House ? Existing Stable Neighbourhood Study.
The document states ?The Town of Aurora initiated a stable neighbourhood study to examine whether the Town's Zoning By-law is effective in maintaining the character of our existing residential neighbourhoods.?
It goes on; ?The Town of Aurora invites you to a Public Open House that will feature a presentation on the existing Official Plan policy and Zoning By-Law and we are seeking your input about how neighbourhood character can be regulated.?
?This is a great opportunity for residents to express what improvements or changes they would like to see to the Town's Zoning By-law in order to protect the character of our existing neighbourhoods.?
The map on the back of the Open House document shows three main study areas. Living on Hill Drive, I am in the middle of the study area bounded by Bathurst, Wellington West and Yonge Street.
This has become an important topic in our community. I can't recall a local issue in the last couple of years that has drawn so many letters to the editor.
In addition to this study, the Town Council has instituted a one-year moratorium on new residential builds that currently exceed development standards.
We have seen slightly different variants on this general type of development issue play out in our communities over the last number of years.
Remember Glenway in Newmarket and the Aurora Highlands Golf Course in Aurora? In both cases, private developers bought the club and existing land from the golf course owner with the intention of erecting town houses, single dwelling homes and in the case of Aurora, a 10 story apartment complex.
In both cases, the home owners in the local area banded together to form rate payers association and in both cases, the private developers appealed to the Ontario Municipal Board. And again in both cases, while cutting back slightly on the number of dwellings, the respective developments moved ahead.
I can partially see where the provincial government is coming from on this.
The Places To Grow Legislation that the former McGuinty government put in place in 2005 ascribed intensification targets for our towns and cities.
This makes general sense as we need to accommodate further population growth in our province and every community has to do their respective share in accepting more folks.
But what I find different about this situation is that Aurora, from what I could tell at the time, was meeting its mandated interim intensification targets and Highland Gate was a mature community.
If the town is meeting these targets, then locally elected officials should have ultimate say over zoning and planning within Aurora.
Fast forwarding to today, I do agree that something has to be done to protect the sanctity of our existing community.
Just to be clear; at this point, I have not seen any of these monster homes being built on my street and I have not (yet) been impacted, but I know that this could happen at some point in the future.
I would like to think that common sense and respect for your neighbours would rule the day and that we would not need to put By-laws in place but I know that the world doesn't work this way.
On the one hand, we need to respect the ambience and character of our existing neighbourhoods. People who buy into these streets should be given some latitude if they are tearing down and building a new dwelling or enlarging an existing home, but not be given carte blanche to do what they like.
There needs to be some limits on height and the size of dwelling. Also, protections need to be put in place to guarantee the rights of the existing homeowners to sunshine on their property and to the general enjoyment of their own property, among others.
On the other hand, I certainly understand those who want to maximize the value of their investment and don't want any restrictions placed on them by local planning authorities.
In the end, like most good pieces of legislation or workable solutions, there will need to be a compromise - from both sides.

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