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?The game is changing and you need to prepare yourselves?

By Brock Weir

Developers aren't interested in Aurora's plans, they are interested in meeting the needs of their buyers and their own bottom line. This, in the view of Aurora resident Steve Williams who came forward to Council last week to deliver a message on the future of the community's established ?stable neighbourhoods.?

?It is not business as usual,? Mr. Williams told local lawmakers. ?The game is changing and you need to prepare yourselves to deal with that new reality.?

Mr. Williams was one of nearly 200 residents to fill Town Hall last week for a Special Council Meeting dedicated to the issue of stable neighbourhoods and how to protect them.

Aurora has been looking at possible changes to local zoning bylaws that would regulate the size an scope of infill developments ? particularly tear-downs and renovations ? to ensure they are in keeping with the neighbourhoods around them.

How to address this issue, and to what degree, has been a contentious issue within these neighbourhoods with some fighting to maintain the unique characteristics of the communities they have grown to love and, in turn, protecting what they feel are their property values, with others taking the opposite track, arguing that restrictions on what can or can't be built on their properties would keep them from realising the maximum sale price on their land.

While opinions have been more varied in letters to the editor and posts on social media, the nearly-dozen opinions expressed by neighbours at the podium last week were fairly consistent: they all agreed that something needed to be done, but just what that ?something? is and how far it should go offered some grey areas.

Most delegates spoke on behalf of themselves and/or their families, but Neil Asselin, however, took to the podium on behalf of the Town Park Area Ratepayers Association, a group of homeowners in the streets surrounding Town Park and much of what has come to be known as Aurora's ?Cultural Precinct? area.

He presented Council with a number of concerns including what he described as ?excessive? lot coverage and height of new builds, ?over-expressive and ostentatious? builds that are not in keeping with the simpler architectural styles of the existing neighbourhood, adequate yard setbacks to make sure residents can properly access and service their properties, garages that dominate the facades of new homes, and even suggested that new builds be encouraged to incorporate front porches.

New houses in this area, he said, should have a maximum height of 8.5 metres to the midpoint of the roof for a two-storey home, while a bungalow should be set at 6.5 metres to the midpoint. There should also be a minimum setback of 25 per cent of the lot.

?In general, we have been delighted with the support we have received from all of you through our one on one discussions,? Mr. Asselin told Council members. ?It appears we can all agree that we need a common sense set of bylaws that encourages compatible development for new housing. We have always, and continue to maintain, that we welcome new development and we welcome this opportunity to shape how new development can be undertaken.

?We residents are a passionate bunch. We support anything local. We gather in the park, on street corners and sidewalks, chat over fences and through hedgerows. All the while, we understand and respect the need for privacy on our own property. Some have grown up on these streets and continue to live here; some have lived here many decades or, like me, are newcomers. None of this can be measured in a metric or will ever appear in a report. There is a social infrastructure that hinges on this neighbourhood and many of us feel that insensitive development can unravel this precious fabric that has been woven over time.?

These unique characteristics often attract new homeowners into Aurora's stable neighbourhoods, and while this was one factor which drew Kelly Citron to Aurora Heights three years ago, she is concerned that changes to the zoning bylaws could impact the plans she has for her dream home down the line.

?I currently live in my basement and rent my upstairs. It is my only way to get into the property market,? she told Council. ?When I bought in the Aurora Heights area I didn't just want to buy a starter home, I wanted to buy my forever home. By living in the basement and renting the upstairs, it kind of gives a win-win; it helps eventually as I grow, as my family grows, my fiancé and I will be able to rent the basement and live upstairs, but we also wanted to have future opportunities by possibly adding a second floor and a garage.

?That being said, I don't want to build an ugly monstrosity, which is an entire box that takes up my entire property. I want to be a good neighbour, but I also want that opportunity to be able to grow and be able to rent out my basement. ? I just wanted to make sure I will have those future opportunities as well. Whether it is architectural or some restrictions-ish to provide a little bit of flexibility and still be a good neighbour, still be able to have a beautiful home in a beautiful neighbourhood, I think we just need to

be careful that as we add restrictions, no matter what way that ends up being, we still can provide that win-win situation.?