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Open letter to Council on stable neighbourhoods issue

I am writing this letter in preparation for the Public Planning Meeting for a zoning by-law amendment for the Stable Neighbourhood Study Area being held at the town offices on June 27.

I attended the Planning meeting held on May 29, which was to discuss possible changes to by-laws in stable neighbourhoods to match the provision in the Town's Official Plan to protect these neighbourhoods from incompatible development.

At a planning meeting in February, there was follow up to a motion Councillor Gaertner had made to update the by-laws for stable neighbourhoods to match the direction of the Official Plan. At the May meeting, a number of people delegated and stated concerns and in some cases, clear direction the Council could take to ensure the older neighbourhoods would be protected from incompatible monster homes that reduced the ability of the present residents from enjoying their homes- including reducing sunlight and privacy. Since there has been a rapid increase in the number of these homes in the study areas it is imperative that the changes be made in a timely manner. This is a concern that was stated in October 2017 and to date there has been no change to protect these areas. In fact the bylaws were updated 7 years ago except for changes to reflect protection of stable neighbourhoods. You have had 7 years to update these bylaws so what is the delay?

At the meeting on May 29, while Council members appeared to be supportive when people spoke about the impact that incompatible new builds had on their neighbourhoods, the discussion was much less supportive after many had left. Once many of the residents had left the discussion became similar to the discussion four years ago related to one of the areas becoming a Heritage District, where Councillors used obfuscation, delay tactics and politicking to basically agree to not move forward in any positive way. However, this time they a least agreed to have another meeting and I hope that there is some positive change after that meeting . To be quite honest I found the discussion to be insulting and paternalistic and felt that the Council and Mayor really thought the residents wouldn't understand or realize what they were doing.

Although specific suggestions were made by associations as to some appropriate changes that would minimally affect building in the stable neighbourhoods the council spent significant time discussing what possible changes could be made and, while I was there, no one suggested using the changes proposed by the ratepayers association. It was also suggested that all the stable neighbourhoods besides the study areas should be included which would delay any timely change and Councillor Thom also suggested that the old SE area should be made a Heritage District knowing that would delay the process for 3-4 years and by the time it was designated, if it ever was, it would be too late for the area as many of the older homes will have been demolished and monster homes built in their place.

Since that meeting it has become evident that there is very little interest in the Council and Mayor supporting anything that might limit building in any of the stable neighbourhoods or anywhere else in Aurora. One might ask why the Council and Mayor find it so difficult to decide on a plan but only have to realize, once again it is an election year, and my question to the Councillors and Mayor is as follows- why do developers, who in most cases don't even live in Aurora, hold more sway than the residents of Aurora who elected you and pay your wages?

Also since that meeting the Town has indicated that it would like to designate a number of the significant heritage buildings on Yonge Street that have been purchased by a developer. I say it is about time but I fear it may be too late.

My final thought is this: If nothing is done to protect the stable neighbourhoods and they end up looking like North York with many condo buildings then they should not spend one more dime of taxpayers money to develop the Library Square or the Cultural Precinct as there will be nothing for people to come to see. No one ever travelled to Europe or Quebec City to look at condos and monster subdivision homes. They go to these places to see history and I predict that if nothing is done to rein in the overdevelopment in Aurora, especially the downtown core, there will not be anything worth seeing nor any reason to visit Aurora. Therefore millions of dollars will be spent on a boondoggle.

Every time I read a newspaper there is another story about the loss of our heritage through development. I now have little hope for the heritage homes and buildings in Ontario and I feel it is extremely distressing that now the wants of individual business owners is deemed more important than the better good of the community. I guess we say farewell to any significant historical buildings in Ontario.

I suggest any resident who is interested in preserving the cultural, heritage and social fabric of Aurora they should show up at the meeting on June 27 and let council know that we will not let this happen to Aurora without a significant fight.

Lenore Pressley
Aurora