

# Site plan approval in stable neighbourhoods get Council green light

**By Brock Weir**

Aurora's stable neighbourhoods will soon have extra protections in their corner.

Council last week gave the green light to a new Site Plan Approval bylaw for new developments, redevelopments, and additions equal to or greater than 50 square metres within three communities identified as 'stable neighbourhoods' - Regency Acres, Aurora Heights, and the neighbourhoods surrounding Town Park.

Council's approval came after months of debate around the Council table, five meetings in which opinion was offered by dozens of residents impacted by stable neighbourhoods protection, and, in the views of some Council members, last week's decision still falls well short of the mark.

The Site Plan Approval bylaw, which also includes detached garages of any size, and is applicable to both detached and semi-detached dwellings, is seen as something of a stop gap by residents, a band-aid before addressing what they see as the real problem: existing zoning bylaws being incompatible with Aurora's Official Plan, thus allowing for the construction of 'monster homes' within the communities.

This was a view shared by Councillor Wendy Gaertner, who voted against the measures.

Speaking against the bylaw, she noted the dramatically dwindling members of the public who have filled the Council galleries in the last two meetings concerned with this issue.

'I see very few residents here for the stable neighbourhood issue, which is interesting after having five meetings and hundreds of residents come to the Chamber,' said Councillor Gaertner. 'My understanding is [they feel] Council hasn't listened to them. If the motion to approve the site plan control for the stable neighbourhoods fails, I will be making another motion and I will be asking Council to sincerely think about adding the moratorium to our interim control bylaw that goes until the end of January and staff said last week that it is possible.

'It is the only thing that will protect these neighbourhoods in the interim.'

In opposing the measure, Councillor Gaertner posed a number of questions to Marco Ramunno, Aurora's Director of Planning, including whether an entire municipality could be designated under a site plan control bylaw.

But Mr. Ramunno said Site Plan Control would give planning staff the ability to pass judgement based on many architectural features, including size, and allow them to 'try and attempt to control massing, materials, colours, architectural styles, et cetera.'

But Councillor Gaertner contended that existing zoning bylaws do not address character, appearance, and other design features.

'I am assuming the site plan control bylaw will look at everything in the context of zoning bylaws that are in place, but can staff, for the other issues that residents feel so strongly against with respect to character, scale, appearance, design features, can staff form parameters that take those into account?' she asked.

'Yes, we can,' Mr. Ramunno applied. 'As I mentioned last week, they would be part of the negotiations when I sit down with the applicant to deal with not only the architecture, but the scale, the height, the size of the proposed structure.

'The standards within the zoning bylaw are more regulated development, but once we have the site plan control, staff will work with the applicants and also indicate to them the process that we've followed today over the last six or seven months that it is the intention of Council to continue to review our existing zoning bylaw standards.'

Among the issues Mr. Ramunno said his department would raise with residents is that a 10 metre high roof line is 'an issue' and that they will work with applicants and developers to bring that scale down.

'If they are bringing forward a proposal that is 10 metres and has an architectural style we feel doesn't fit into that neighbourhood, we will work with them to try to bring that down,' he added, conceding Councillor Gaertner's point that if the zoning bylaw remains as is, the applicants really don't need to listen.

'At the end of the day, the provisions in the zoning bylaw are legally still in place but we still have a say over architectural style and the overall look and treatment of the roof, etc. It will be an ongoing discussion, we will have that control, there is a process that they will have to follow to be reviewed by staff at the end of the day until we actually change the zoning bylaw we're working with our current standards but we will have some control and say and encourage them to reduce scale and change the architecture.'

In the end, however, Councillor Gaertner said she agreed with Regency Acres resident Robin Grey who told Council that there are only two options available to Council: freeze development or change zoning bylaws.

'The bottom line reality actually is that the only thing that is going to protect the neighbourhoods, protect the hundreds of people who come to Council are actually what Ms. Grey said: either a moratorium that is attached to what is already in place or simply

having a committee of residents work with Mr. Ramunno to form a set of zoning bylaws that would be appropriate and then that comes to Council," said Councillor Gaertner. "I will be voting against this, hoping that Council will decide to put the best protection in place for our residents."