

?Attainable? housing a focus in Town?s 2051 plan

As home prices continue to soar, Aurora's growth plans through 2051 could include financial incentives for affordable housing.

Council last week received an update on the latest drafts of the Town's Official Plan, one which will act as a blueprint for growth and development through 2051.

As the public continues to contribute on how they would like to see the Town foster development and meet intensification and growth targets set by the Province of Ontario, affordable ? or ?attainable? ? housing has become a key driver in the latest draft.

?The Town heard that it will be important for the Official Plan to appropriately balance growth and intensification and natural spaces in order to protect Aurora's rich natural heritage features when adding development,? said consultants in a discussion paper presented to Council. ??Gentle density' was discussed as an important piece to growth while respecting existing community character, which would allow for a mix of housing typologies while limiting building height and ensuring compatible built form. Tied to infill growth was support for housing prices on current and future residents, local employers and their employees.

?Developing the Town into a healthy, strong and complete community includes consideration for a number of inter-related elements, including providing accessible public spaces, supporting healthy lifestyle choices, providing attainable housing and protecting the Town's natural and historic character. We heard the need to improve accessibility and walkability, as well as active transportation opportunities through cycling infrastructure and better connections to key destinations, such as parks and natural heritage features. We also heard that urban design has a key role to play in planning and protecting the character of Aurora while ensuring development is carried out in a way that beautifies and enhances the Town, which includes support for public art. Additionally, the Official Plan has the opportunity to consider financial incentives and tools to improve housing affordability.?

Opportunities for affordable housing could be found in infill development, said consultants, with examples including single-family townhouses, stacked townhouses and low-rise apartments and condos.

?Certainly there are different kinds of housing types that can be considered that are more dense and are considered, I think, good transitions from those low-density residential neighbourhoods that might be adjacent to the [Aurora] Promenade to higher-density built form,? said consultant David Riley. ?[The list] is not to exclude any kind of housing types that might be appropriate such as duplexes or triplexes.?

Reviewing the update, Councillor Wendy Gaertner said she was pleased the document notes that Town-wide policies have an important role in ?supporting a mixed range of housing that meets the diverse needs of households? and that ?housing for all residents will continue to be an important aspect of planning for the future? but wanted to make sure the ?missing middle? is addressed.

She also asked for clarification on the difference between ?affordable? and, as it is termed in the draft, ?attainable? housing.

?The whole ?missing middle' is missing here,? said Councillor Gaertner. ?Everybody has been talking about that at different levels of government. The other thing that is missing here is the ?affordable' component. With respect to housing type, I don't really see that. I think we absolutely need to see that, otherwise we're just going to be having dark basement apartments and that is not really acceptable.?

Pressing further on where the term ?attainable housing? came from, Mr. Riley said the term is becoming ?more common? in the planning world and is ?really meant to address broadly the notion that housing is becoming not affordable in the sense of CMHA affordability based on income levels, but attainable to everyone in terms of being able to afford rent or ownership.?

??Attainable' is kind of a broader thing for all of us and the term ?affordable housing' is more of that housing for people who have

lower incomes, affordable ownership and affordable rent based on those CMHA benchmarks.?

Added consultant Paul Lowes: ?It is making sure our middle-income folks ? our teachers, our nurses, our firefighters ? can actually afford a home. They are not looking for affordable housing, they are looking for a home they can afford to live in and maintain in the municipality. We're certainly looking at the missing middle through the Promenade, the MTSA (Major Transit Station Area ? Aurora's GO Station) and the municipality. The missing middle is the townhouses, the more ground-related homes that are missing. It's not those massive towers you see, it's the smaller forms that can be a broad range. Stacked townhouses can help that missing middle; walk-ups, smaller-scale townhouses. There's a broad range.?

Councillor Gaertner nevertheless said more wording was needed in the draft to address the needs of the missing middle.

?We have a lot of people who have to rent and will always have to rent,? she said. ?When you're looking at something like a duplex, a four-plex, you're talking about housing that can accommodate renter families where they have a back yard. Those are very important types of housing for renters.

?If you look at ?gentle intensification' you can add another home if you have a long lot.?

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