

Aurora Heights community will stay in Stable Neighbourhoods discussion

By Brock Weir

The Aurora Heights community will remain a part of Site Plan controls impacting Stable Neighbourhoods, despite attempts to remove it in the lead up to last week's Council meeting.

Council approved a new bylaw that will see Site Plan approval be required by new developments within four areas identified as 'stable neighbourhoods' within Aurora.

Going into the previous meeting's General Committee meeting, however, lawmakers faced a recommendation that impacted just Regency Acres, the neighbourhood surrounding Town Park, and segments of Temperance Street as part of the study, leaving the Aurora Heights neighbourhood out of the protected zones.

According to a report before Council by Lawrence Kuk, Manager of Development Planning, the Aurora Heights neighbourhood was not proposed as part of the Site Plan Control bylaw because 'the majority of the resident concerns regarding the type and scale of development' was focused in Regency Acres and Town Park.

This was, however, not reflective of the view of the Aurora Heights Ratepayers' Association.

The group was represented at last week's meeting by Allison Halls, who said she was 'quite dismayed' that the recommendation before Council took Aurora Heights off the table.

'I am quite dismayed and, in some sense angry, that someone would propose the Aurora Heights neighbourhood be removed from the Stable Neighbourhoods designation when it has been there since the beginning of this process,' said Ms. Halls. 'Furthermore, what we're asking and what we have been asking through our attendance and comments at each of the meetings is we also want the zoning bylaws to align with the official plan. I think we have been consistent in that. We are a newer ratepayers' association and that is working against us. I am not sure why.'

While the report left the door open to adding new areas down the road, the majority of Council agreed Aurora Heights should be included from the outset.

Responding to Mayor Geoff Dawe's questions on why this particular neighbourhood was excluded in the first go-round, Marco Ramunno, Aurora's Director of Planning, said that, although area ratepayers have come forward asking for protection, his department has not noticed new builds, particularly the large-scale new builds, dubbed 'monster homes', that residents in other areas have found so objectionable.

'From the Aurora Heights perspective, I live in that area and there is development going on,' said Councillor Sandra Humfries. 'There is one in particular, I don't want to name the street, but it has caused a number of concerns with the neighbours. I don't want to insult anybody but [it sticks out] like a sore thumb in the rest of the area. I think it would be great to include it and just have an opportunity to take a look at what is going to be done there and know it is still going to conform with the neighbourhood.'

This was a view shared by Councillor John Abel, who said he valued the input given by the Aurora Heights Ratepayers.

'In my mind, if you exclude the other two (Regency Acres and Town Park), development opportunities will look for the next place and that will be on the north side,' he said. 'Although they are different and distinct, they are similar in that they are larger lots and small bungalows. Perfect for bigger homes that fit the style. We're not opposed to people building their dream homes, we just want conformity and that has been expressed very clearly.'

Councillor Paul Pirri, on the other hand, offered a contrary viewpoint, noting he agreed with the reasons for excluding Aurora Heights as outlined by Mr. Ramunno.

'There are no major developments happening in this area,' said Councillor Pirri. 'I would rather see Mr. Ramunno move expediently on the other two areas of town as opposed to this.'

By the time it was time to ratify the decision last Tuesday, only one member of the public approached the podium, this time Robin Grey, a resident of the Regency Acres area, speaking on behalf of her ratepayers' group, as well as the ones representing Aurora Heights and the Town Park area.

From her perspective, there were only two practical solutions at Council's disposal.

'The three ratepayers groups are asking the Town to consider that there are two choices available to stop the incompatible homes being built in the three neighbourhoods that have been recognized,' she said. 'The first option is to freeze development in the three areas immediately, or to direct planning to work with the three ratepayers' groups to change the zoning bylaws to stop any growth because the proposed site plan will not help.'

'We are not in agreement with what has been presented in the past and most of us were in attendance last week, and this is a

continuation of that. The choices are to stop until the new Council, whatever you have suggested, Mr. Ramunno wants things weighted until January until he has architectural. It has to stop now and you have two choices.?