

Church rebuild plans come down two storeys but neighbours still worried



By Brock Weir

A proposed nine-storey seniors residence, proposed to be built in conjunction with the new Aurora United Church, has been brought down to seven following an outcry from the surrounding community ? but, despite this reduction, area neighbours are still seeing red.

Earlier this spring, the Aurora United Church came forward with long-gestating plans to rebuild on the site of their former home, which was destroyed in a devastating fire in April 2014. The plan to build once again was warmly received by the community, but the partnership with Amica, which will see the seniors residence builders use land surrounding the church on a 99-year lease raised alarm bells.

The primary alarm bell was the proposed height of the building, which would loom over Temperance and Tyler Streets, both long-established residential thoroughfares.

Residents said they were concerned with the massing of the building when compared with existing homes in the area and said the retirement residence was not set back far enough from the street to be in character with the existing neighbourhood.

Some of these concerns were addressed by the Church (AUC) and Developers on a community meeting on Thursday night which presented the revised proposal, reduced to seven storeys, to local ratepayers and Aurorans at large.

?From Day One we have met with the Aurora Village Ratepayers Association and this is the second meeting we have welcomed them all to come and look at what we're trying to do and achieve,? said Brian North, Chair of the AUC Building Committee, just days after Council fielded concerns from the same neighbours about homes on Temperance and Tyler which they say will need to be demolished to make way for the new building complex.

?They were upset about the houses, but those houses truly should be condemned,? said Mr. North. ?Those houses need to come down regardless of what they end up doing. There was also the issue of too much glass around Temperance Street. Our original plan was to reflect Temperance, but we listened so changed it across the back to more brick. Height was an issue and we have come down two whole floors.

?We are trying to meet the needs of the community. We understand we are never going to meet the wants of everybody but we're trying to compromise. Succession Developments have been a phenomenal partner because they do listen to the people. They want to be good neighbours, and the United Church wants to be good neighbours with everybody.?

The Ratepayers in question, however, do not feel they are being listened to and the revised plans did not make them leave feeling satisfied and, if their concerns are not addressed, they are not ruling out the possibility of appealing the proposal, if passed by Council, to the Ontario Municipal Board.

?The new plan has done some superficial adjustments in materials and removes only height from the front of the building,? said Troy Hourie on behalf of the Aurora Village Ratepayers Association. ?The corner of Tyler and Temperance remains as it was originally designed. There will be a huge seven storey box, designed right up to the property line that has the same shallow setbacks and will overshadow our neighbourhood.

?Amica has removed two floors from the Yonge elevation, but our concerns about the massing, step backs and tiering on Tyler and Temperance Streets were not addressed,? said Troy Hourie on behalf of the Aurora Village Ratepayers Association. ?These have not

changed whatsoever. There is no transition in use and massing from the new development to the neighborhood.

?These three items were presented as the first and foremost concerns at a Ratepayer meeting with AMICA and Brian North of the Aurora United Church two weeks ago. They were also handed a set of schematics and a list of revisions we wanted considered in terms of the massing and transitioning and none of these items were changed in the latest revision to the developer's plan.?

The Ratepayers, he added, have already made it clear they are considering referring the matter to the OMB as their requests ?have been blatantly ignored.?

?Council needs to start supporting the Ratepayers and our petition supporters,? said Mr. Hourie.

Mr. North, on the other hand, has a different perspective on the matter.

?I can understand why the massing was a concern but we have done our best to fix that. The problem is we are limited with the amount of land we have to work with and they are limited with how small they can go to keep this agreement with Aurora United Church.?

The revised plan will be up for Council discussion and further public input at the next Public Planning meeting, set for next Wednesday, May 24, at 7 p.m. in Council Chambers.