

## Council told residents have 'lawyerred up' to oppose shelter

From safety concerns to environmental worries, residents opposing a planned emergency men's shelter in Aurora's south end came out to Town Hall armed with arguments ' and armed with a legal team to take the fight to the next level, Council was told.

'This community is activated, organized, we're locked and loaded, we've lawyerred up, we've hired planners, we have environmentalists,' resident Mike Zelyony, told local lawmakers at last week's Public Planning meeting, where a proposal for an emergency men's shelter on Yonge Street, opposite the foot of Industrial Parkway South, took up more than five hours of debate.

Dozens of opponents to the plan descended on Council Chambers on January 24 where they raised a number of issues with what was before them, including how a men's shelter might adversely affect their community.

'Among the risks are those to our safety and security, as well as our economic interests,' said Nadia Somani. 'The impacts around environment, neighbourhood experience and neighbourhood character cannot be understated, either.'

Somani said the distance between the proposed building and their neighbourhood, just south of the site in question, 'is insufficient to provide security and safety' for the neighbours. Vulnerable people also live in the community, including children and seniors, and that too is a security concern.

'The experience in those suburbs (with comparable shelters) is clear: there is increased crime to personal property, there is increased drug paraphernalia scattered about and strewn across the street, not just in proximity to the shelter, but elsewhere. There is an increased lack of sense and security and safety of residents, all of which erodes our security and infringes upon our right to enjoy our property and it doesn't support our reasonable expectations of belonging to a Town that has said in all of its communications they are committed to our safety, security and wellbeing. Allowing this'would mean the Town is not adhering to its own principles.

Another neighbour, Taribo S-Douglas, said she was 'surprised' by the 'situation' in which their community found itself and the number of people in the Council chamber last week should be a testament to community opposition and 'resistance.'

'We're not happy with it,' she said. 'We, the community members are going to be the first set of people that will experience the disadvantages that come with [having a shelter in the neighbourhood]. Right now, we have the retirement home next to us, the older people living there walk in and out of the community. You can imagine that is what is going to be replicated when we have this shelter. You can't stop them coming in.

'Please look for an alternative that is less resistant. I don't think our neighbours are opposed [to what the Region] wants to do, we're not against it, but I don't think this is thought out, not well-planned. If I knew when I was buying from the builder that this structure was going to be built'I would not have bought. In as much as we empathize'and we know that as Council members and as a city, you have a social responsibility to the less privileged, but you also have a responsibility to us.'

These concerns were echoed by Melissa Losco who said, with a nearby retirement home, a funeral home across the street, and a nursing home across the street, her community has 'done our share.'

'There's a strong correlation between homelessness and mental health issues, which can lead to an increase in criminal activity,' she said. 'In relation to why this location was selected was on the Region's website that it is in close proximity to transit. Although this is true, this is also where young children 'elementary school age ' wait for the school bus, pickups and drop-offs. Facing a shelter minutes away from a school bus stop is a great concern for this community. Children who are not accompanied by a parent due to busy work schedules would make for an unsafe environment for the children and stress a parent who needs to drop off their child.'

'I slept in this neighbourhood with the peace of mind [that] this was a secluded area, surrounded by homeowners I would get acquainted with. Building this housing complex so close to the neighbourhood strips us all, me and my fellow neighbours, from this

use. Being a homeowner in the Woodhaven community, this project brings about a great deal of concern for my safety and the safety of others.?

A police officer in attendance, she said, could give crime statistics, but she wanted to see a ?skilled real estate agent stand up and tell us this won't affect the house prices in our neighbourhood.?

Area resident Roy Cohen told Council that the community needs to ?work together? to find a better area for a shelter. As president of the Aurora Youth Soccer Club, he said every one of their volunteers needs to pass a police check, and asked what assurances the Region could give that similar screenings would be applied to residents of the potential shelter.

?We are torn,? he said. ?We all have empathy, we all understand that everybody is god's children and we need to assist, but I believe we need a comprehensive study, and this is something you should take back to your crew, and explain to them that a facility isn't enough. You need training, counsellors? 24-hour security, you need to be able to assist and get them to where they need to be and integrate them back into mainstream society.?

Also looking for alternatives was local business owner Shaheen Moledina, who questioned bylaws that would allow for a shelter like this to be built close to the day care and school she owns.

?I would like to commend the great work by our Mayor as an advocate for the Town standing behind our Official Plan and ensuring our legacy as Aurorans remains intact. We need to support our environmental protection area zoning with new Bill 23, we already are at risk. This development is in our control to deny ?. The facility is going to house 68 beds. Why do we have to go with a men's shelter idea that segregates instead of looking at an inclusive building facility like a community housing project that has subsidy, mid-subsidy and market rent? What is the success rate for this men's shelter, based on previous? The Region's support has been in effect for several decades. Has there been any investigation for improved methods??

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter