

Modern Property Standards should account for light pollution: Council

Light pollution and noise could be two factors coming under increased scrutiny in a modernized Property Standards Bylaw for Aurora.

Council set the wheels in motion on a revised bylaw last week following a motion from Councillor Rachel Gilliland who said after 22 years and a 'drastically' changed landscape, it was time to bring the bylaw into the twenty-first century.

'My investigation was initiated by concerns of light pollution,' said Councillor Gilliland, after reading a letter of support from a constituent who shared these concerns over light pollution. 'A lot of this has been caused by the new technology of LED lighting and I have also been approached by residents who have concerns about exposed garbage receptacles in view by residential areas and vehicles parking on front lawns or creating new parking pads on their front lawns.

'After discussions with staff, they agreed [that] with the emergence of brighter LED lights and other growth in technologies that we could really benefit from a review' and I discovered this hasn't been dusted off since 1999. A lot has changed in Aurora over the last 22 years. We've seen an increase in residential homes, multi-level development and business growth, so I kind of feel now is an opportune time in which staff can review the Property Standards bylaws to reflect our growth and modernization. It is not just limited to the lighting pollution this resident specifically spoke of, but there are many different avenues such as retaining walls, driveway delineation, and I could go on and on. Needless to say, this is just to really modernize the bylaw [so that] it reflects our growth and modernization.'

First out of the gate to support the motion was Councillor Sandra Humfries who said the 'timing was right' to review policies overall, but with particular emphasis on light pollution.

'I had a resident who has a small bungalow alongside a home that was just built [at] two storeys and the lights are often left overnight and lighting into their homes,' she said. 'It is causing them some grief, so I appreciate this motion and am looking forward to hearing what staff have to say.'

Agreed Councillor Harold Kim: 'It deserves a much-needed review given how much time has passed. Certainly, in my seven years on Council, there are instances where certain property standards needed to be reviewed.'

Similarly, Councillor Wendy Gaertner was in support of the motion, citing both light pollution and noise as top priorities.

'In the past, sometimes we have put the onus on the residents that are disturbed by the light to get better screens or X, Y and Z. It really shouldn't be up to the residents and there is no reason they should be disturbed by neighbours' lights and it can also be a privacy issue.'

Mayor Tom Mrakas added that while he supported the motion, he wanted to make sure whatever came back for Council's review had teeth.

'Maybe it is within the report that does come back within that Property Standards bylaw [that staff] could maybe add a little piece talking about whether we move towards a more proactive approach when it comes to property standards and just what that would entail from a Council perspective,' he said.

Techa van Leeuwen, Aurora's Director of Corporate Services, said her department would 'like to do a comprehensive review' of the bylaw as it is 'outdated' and what will come back will be 'enforceable.'

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter