

New Official Plan will be Aurora's blueprint to 2041

Town launches review of municipal strategy

By Brock Weir

It's a New Year, it's a new decade, and it is time for a new blueprint to guide Aurora into the future.

This winter, the Town is expected to continue the groundwork in developing its new Official Plan, one which will act as a guide for the Town for the next 20 years, through a series of public outreach events, including a Special Council Meeting on February 11 which will give members of the public the opportunity to weigh in on how the Plan should be developed.

Next month's meeting is the next step in a lengthy process which has already included a series of 'pre-launch' pop-up events to introduce the public to the process.

According to Andria Sallese, Senior Policy Planner for the Town of Aurora, this pre-launch consultation engaged more than 300 persons but now it is time to step it up in 2020.

The 2020 Official Plan review will result in an updated Official Plan (OP) that will provide guidance for the municipality until 2041, said Ms. Sallese, launching the review in Council Chambers. The current OP provides guidance in terms of a time horizon to 2031.

Last updated in 2010, the OP has been the subject of several amendments in the ensuing ten years, and a new OP will bring the Town into conformity with a number of pieces of legislation that have been updated since that time, including the Province's Official Growth Plan and the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan.

York Region is undertaking a Municipal Comprehensive Review to bring their Official Plan into conformity with the provincial plans and documents, said Ms. Sallese. We anticipate Regional Council adoption of the Regional OP amendment in 2021. The Region's Municipal Comprehensive Review (MCR) will provide policy direction to local municipalities like Aurora on matters such as local intensification targets, major transit station area targets, employment area conversions and employment density targets, as well as Natural Heritage Areas. We have about a year to update our Official Plan from the date of the Region's approval.

Twelve principles have been pinned down to help guide Aurora's Official Plan review. They include: Promoting responsible growth management; ensuring design excellence; building a greener community; providing a range and mix of housing; providing appropriate community facilities; protecting stable neighbourhoods; developing vibrant new neighbourhoods;

advancing the economy; building a successful downtown; establishing a linked greenlands system; conserving cultural heritage resources; and providing sustainable infrastructure.

“Through the Official Plan Review, we will be revisiting the vision, the principles, to ensure that they are current and reflect the changing needs of the Town,” said Ms. Sallese. “We will be doing that with the community and Council.”

The process in doing so will happen in five stages. The Town is currently in the process of a Background Review and Analysis, and this will be followed by a Growth Analysis which will explore residential and employment growth since 2010 and moving forward towards 2041. The next step will look at Complete, Vibrant & Healthy Communities and how this principle can be facilitated through public policy. The process will be rounded out by direction related to infrastructure and movement and, finally, implementation of the findings.

“A staff report early in 2020 will provide further information about how public consultation has both informed the work program and refined it,” she said, before noting the public engagement sessions that took place in 2019. “We envision the OP review being premised on a robust and innovative approach to public engagement, using in-person and online forums to engage and capture broad spectrum of perspectives. Using this format, we have already engaged over 300 members of the community, which given the preliminary stages of the Official Plan Review, I would say that is quite the success and it has been positively received.” Staff continue to receive input through online surveys on the work program. We are in the process of procuring a public engagement consultant for the study and in early 2020 we're going to host a public open house to receive even more input from the public. That would be a statutory meeting where we sent out formal notice.”

The path towards developing a revised new blueprint for the Town of Aurora received widespread support from Council following Ms. Sallese's presentation.

“We have heard time and time again that our Official Plan is probably the most important document that a Town or a City can have,” said Mayor Tom Mrakas. “It is unfortunate that the Provincial Government might not feel the same way because they have made changes that ultimately take our decision powers, our authority on how we move forward and how we uphold our Official Plan out of our hands with the reversal of some of the rules on LPAT. (Local Planning Appeals Tribunal)

“One thing stuck out for me on the presentation, and that was promoting responsible growth. We talk about it a lot and, to me, that is what this OP is about. It is about looking at how we can responsibly grow, not over-develop our Town, not stop development, but have that responsible growth. I hope through this process that we maintain our height restrictions, because I think that is important for our Town. I have heard it time and time again that

it is important for the residents of this community. I have heard it from the Region where I have asked our Commissioner that if we are mandated to grow to a certain level through the Province and the Region, can we maintain our height restriction yet still meet those targets? The answer was yes.

?I am hoping through this process that we stick to those height restrictions because, to me, that is what is going to keep Aurora Aurora. I am looking forward to going through this process [to] ensure Aurora stays Aurora.?