

New Stable Neighbourhood rules will protect communities: Council

By Brock Weir

New zoning standards will see real results in protecting Aurora's so-called Stable Neighbourhoods from incompatible new builds, according to Council.

But some area residents, and even some Council members, say the new changes do not go far enough and fall far short of what local advocates have been fighting for.

Last Tuesday, Council approved a number of changes to existing zoning bylaws as they pertain to the long-established communities of Regency Acres and Aurora Heights, along with neighbourhoods surrounding Town Park and on Temperance Street.

The new bylaw, which will be formally enacted at a future Council meeting will see the maximum height of new builds pegged at nine metres, or 9.9 metres to the peak of the roof, whichever is less. The maximum height for a detached garage is set at 3.5 metres (or 4.5 metres to the peak of the roof, whichever is less), a maximum lot coverage of 35 per cent or 235 square metres for a dwelling with an incorporated garage, whichever is less, while a dwelling with a detached garage would be limited to 40 per cent lot coverage or 215 square metres, whichever is less.

Gross Floor Area of a new build, a topic which garnered the most concern from area residents, will be set at 370 square metres, or 3,983 square feet.

Residents made one last bid for change at the meeting, with Sandra Sangster, speaking on behalf of the Town Park, Regency Acres and Aurora Heights Ratepayers Associations once again citing discrepancies with the numbers crunched by consultants retained by the Town recommend zoning bylaw changes.

Including just 75 homes on Temperance Street, among a total of 2,111 dwellings examined during the study, skewed the results. If they were taken out of the equation, the correct Gross Floor Area (GFA) should be 3,767 square feet versus the recommended 3,983.

As The Auroran reported last week, the Ratepayers came to Council pitching a compromise on the GFA, but this was ultimately rejected by Council, who decided to go with the consultant's numbers - much to the chagrin of Councillor Wendy Gaertner who said it didn't make sense to give an area as small as Temperance the same weight as the other, much larger neighbourhoods.

?How can we give 75 homes this type of importance,? she asked. ?This bylaw that Council is about to pass will have effects on hundreds and thousands of residents. As was said last week at the

table, we have to uphold our OP and we have to respect the intent of compatible. Residents wanting to protect their quality of life have been coming here for many months. For all of those meetings, they asked for decreases in the height, decreases in the size. They were just asking for protections they felt were suitable for their neighbourhoods. None of that is going to be reflected in our bylaw. It seems to me they are now asking for one very small accommodation to use the weighted averages, so that a neighbourhood of 75 homes will not have the same statistical impact as a neighbourhood of 800. It makes sense to me.

?It is justifiable. Please don't deny them this small compromise.?

This view was supported by Councillor Sandra Humfries who said it was just a ?small compromise.?

?It is a small adjustment and it absolutely makes statistical sense in terms of what we saw presented this evening,? she said. ?Overall, it helps residents just make more sense of what is before them and I am just looking forward to moving forward tonight. Hopefully this will pass.?

Councillor John Gallo was on a similar wavelength. The consultant, he said, did his job in coming up with the numbers, but the ?onus? was on Council to look at the neighbourhoods in more detail and determine some of the outliers.

Other Councillors disagreed.

First to speak against Councillor Gaertner's amendment was Councillor Rachel Gilliland, who said the decision was down to the numbers supplied by the consultant and the numbers supplied by the residents.

?Going back and forth with some of the inconsistent numbers, I just feel we're not really going to find that magic sweet spot, that magic number that is going to be exact for everybody to agree with,? she said, speaking against Councillor Gaertner's motion to adjust the GFA. ?I just feel that this motion is really not accurate to what we're trying to achieve today. I think we have a report in front of us today and that is something we should consider.?

These views were echoed by Councillor Michael Thompson who said there have been ?a lot of different viewpoints? presented on this issue? with some wanting to see further reductions, some less restrictions and some in favour of the status quo.

?The community is divided in their opinions,? he said. ?There is a majority view, there is a minority view, but regardless whatever Council decides on the number I would agree that it is a compromise. It may not satisfy everybody within the community, but we will have accomplished something. When this issue first started, there was great concern about some of the homes that were 5,000, 6,000 square feet. This, as Councillor Gilliland mentioned, the

zoning bylaw was initially put forward... to reduce it by 33 per cent. That is something. I understand there are concerns about the methodology around the weighted average versus another approach...For me, I am comfortable in the number we have been presented.?

Councillor Harold Kim approached matters from a broader perspective. While many of the residents in Council Chambers over the last few weeks were fighting for a reduction in the GFA, there were many other voices to consider, he contended.

?It is not a matter of whether you agree or not, but there is another half of residents in stable neighbourhoods who aren't here tonight and they have their perspectives as well,? he said. ?There are residents on all sides. I don't want there to be any feeling out there that Council's siding with one side or the other. I think we have come up with a number that an external consultant has come out with and I am fine with that.?