Older, stable neighbourhoods need protection from growth: Councillor

By Brock Weir

Some people pick an older house for its charm, others for a plot of land with seemingly limitless potential.

But, how far should this potential go? This is a fine line that needs to be looked at within Aurora, according to Councillor Wendy Gaertner.

Next Tuesday, October 24, Council will consider a motion from the Councillor calling on staff to undertake a study of existing bylaws governing development within stable neighbourhoods to ensure that planning policies are being undertaken.

Protecting stable neighbourhoods is a ?fundamental? principle of Aurora's Official Plan, she contends, but recent reviews of bylaws did not specifically look at bylaws pertaining to older neighbourhoods.

?For the last five months, residents have been in touch with Councillors about new homes they felt were inappropriate in their older neighbourhoods, new homes being built, and the accumulation of that feedback prompted this,? says Councillor Gaertner of her motion. ?When I got the feedback, I had a look at our Official Plan ? and I remember because I was part of that Official Plan process ? that there was recognition there was going to be change in the older residential neighbourhoods but this change there should also [respect its character].?

People often don't understand the difference between an official plan and a zoning bylaw, she adds, and the Official Plan (OP) ?recognizes the importance of protecting and enhancing these stable neighbourhoods when new homes are built [and that] all new developments shall be compatible with its surrounding context.?

?We just went through a very long zoning bylaw review and, during that time, we didn't think of looking at the zoning bylaws in what are called ?stable neighbourhoods,'? says Councillor Gaertner. ?The large homes that are being built actually do fit in with the zoning bylaws that exist ? that is, according to staff because I can't go out and measure them ? with how far a home can be from a neighbour's property line, how high they can be, how much of the lot can be used.?

While most of the concerns Councillor Gaertner says she has heard on the matter are primarily neighbourhoods north of Henderson, west of Murray, Temperance Street and in the vicinity of Town Park moving south towards Dunning, she says there is a ?fine line? that needs to be walked between protecting residents who plan to stay in their homes, and protecting the rights of residents who are looking to move elsewhere and realise the maximum value for their land.

?It is their primary investment,? says Councillor Gaertner of those planning to sell up. ?The intent isn't to try and stop these larger homes from going in to decrease anybody's gain from selling their homes; it is just to try and take those zoning bylaws to see if we can do anything that is more in keeping with older neighbourhoods. We looked [at something similar] on Hillview. That street didn't want to have any additional zoning restrictions and we heard from residents. Some of them wanted to keep the size of the [incoming homes] in keeping with their own, but others wanted to have no restrictions on their properties when we sold them. We listened to them and we didn't put in any restrictions.

?We have heard from a lot of residents who are unhappy, so hopefully we will hear from residents who are not happy, residents who are happy, and then it is up to Council to make a decision. That was a comprehensive review and out of it came all these planning principles that older neighbourhoods need to be protected from incompatible development. I don't think that translated to the zoning bylaws and I think we need to look at that and [see] if we're happy with that or if we need to change that. We looked at zoning bylaw for the whole town. I take responsibility because I have been on Council the longest ? but it didn't occur to me that we needed to look at the zoning bylaws for older neighbourhoods. In my opinion we should have and, in my opinion, we should do that now.?