

Planning applications should cost non-residents more in stable neighbourhoods: Councillor

Non-residents shouldn't get a financial break when looking at site plan applications in Aurora's so-called Stable Neighbourhoods, according to Councillor Wendy Gaertner.

Councillor Gaertner raised concerns around the Council table last week as she and fellow lawmakers made a final sweep of new fees and charges set to be levied by Town Hall for various services in 2022.

If the fee proposals go unchanged by the time they are up for ratification on October 26, non-resident developers will be charged \$277 to file their applications in these key areas versus \$725 in other areas of Town.

‘They are mainly residents who apply for these, so we’re just charging them the amount of almost like our title search costs and some of the other expenses we have,’ said Town Solicitor Patricia De Sario. ‘Other minor site plan [applications] are in other areas that are not just stable neighbourhoods and those are typically corporate businesses or developers, so we are charging them a higher fee.’

This, however, did not sit well with Councillor Gaertner who cited people from outside Aurora coming in to snap up properties already occupied by a home often with the intent of building bigger.

‘Most of the new homes, the very large homes in the stable neighbourhoods, they are non-resident homes,’ said the Councillor. ‘We’re charging non-resident developers \$227 in stable neighbourhoods and in other areas we’re charging non-resident developers \$725.’

‘When I spoke to [this issue] some months ago, there was going to be no charge for the fees because of what you just said, that it is mostly residents; but, in fact, and it is very easy to check, it is a very high per cent of non-residents. It’s developers who buy a resident’s home that is small and they put up a much larger house on that lot. Their fees should be just the same as fees in any other part of Town. I find it disrespectful that there would be a different charge in the stable neighbourhoods, one of our vulnerable neighbourhoods for very large homes. I think that if someone wants to build a house there, they should pay just as much in fees as anybody else.’

Aurora's stable neighbourhoods have been a hotly contested issue in recent years as residents have fought back against larger-scale infill development in neighbourhoods that have been typified by smaller family homes for decades – and sometimes even more than a century.

Neighbourhoods in Aurora designated as ‘stable neighbourhoods’ include the Heritage Conservation District on the northeast quadrant of Yonge and Wellington, the community surrounding Town Park, Aurora Heights, Regency Acres, and Temperance Street.

Planning fees are not the only charges set to change in the year ahead.

Many services provided by the Town, including electrical vehicle (EV) charging stations, will see an increase in 2022 due to inflation.

‘In support of the multi-year operating budget framework, Council approved inflationary increases to most fees for 2022 as part of the process in 2019,’ said Laura Sheardown, Financial Management Advisor for the Town of Aurora. ‘The inflationary increases are necessary to maintain desired applicable service cost recovery benchmarks.’

‘The proposed 2022 fees and charges have been adjusted to reflect changes to departmental costs in providing applicable services to

users. All fee increases will alleviate pressure of the 2022 tax base. When costs increase because of inflation, but non-tax revenues do not, the tax levy must accommodate this additional budget burden. Consequently, it is important that the fees and charges keep pace with inflation; the proposed fees and charges within this bylaw strive to achieve this goal.?

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter