

## Preservation in Aurora's southeast quadrant gets second wind

**By Brock Weir**

It might be a neighbourhood characterised by old homes, but preservation of Aurora's downtown Southeast Quadrant got a second wind at Council last week.

Although Council earlier, following significant complaints from area residents, rejected going any further with a Heritage Conservation District in the area, Council signed off on a motion from Councillor Wendy Gaertner asking Town Staff to prepare an arsenal of options ranging from zoning options to clauses under Aurora's official plan to protect the character of the neighbourhood when evaluating any future development within the area.

"We had a lot of people in this Chamber with respect to designating this area as a heritage district," said Councillor Gaertner. "More people felt it was not appropriate to designate the area because it might impose onerous restrictions on home owners, but I don't think anyone in the Chamber at that time didn't want to protect the valuable heritage in this area and I think, as a Council, because we know many residents [throughout Aurora] value that area [historically and culturally] it would be a very good idea for us, as a Council, to find out what we do have available for us to protect the area."

Councillor Gaertner's motion found support first from Councillor Sandra Humfries, who sits on Aurora's Heritage Advisory Committee. She said it would be valuable to have staff pull together resources to articulate and deliver options in a way which won't cause any strife between neighbours.

"I am sorry how the [HCD] turned out for neighbours, but I think this will allow the delivery of the intention of that study, without causing any title issues or concerns in that area," she said.

Some, however, weren't so positive about whether the motion would achieve objectives.

Although he was initially in favour of an HCD this year, Councillor Paul Pirri said the objections of area residents ultimately took precedence over his views, but he wanted to see what could be done to provide a level of protection.

In response, Marco Ramunno, Aurora's Director of Planning, told Council there might be opportunities out there, such as site plan control, and design control measures, but options might be limited.

"I am not overly optimistic of what we can do, but I hope there is more than what I am feeling there is," said Councillor Pirri.

More optimistic, however, was Councillor John Abel, who said the Official Plan and zoning bylaws would go a long way to help maintain the character of a conservation.

"This is just addressing concerns that may exist because the Conservation District was not allowed, that we want to ensure there are ways to conserve," he said. "To me, it is just a matter of a report coming from the department so that we all understand and we are all on equal footing and can relate to our residents what is going on and what is available."

In making sure the residents are able to find out everything that is available to help preserve the character of their neighbourhood, however, was not through a report to Council from staff, but rather through public engagement, according to Councillor Michael Thompson.

"I think a better way to satisfy the needs of the residents is why not present it to them as an information session, a little more informal, so we can present to the residents and talk to them about what is in place today to help them preserve the neighbourhood and the character of it. In that informal setting, they can ask questions."

In Councillor Evelyn Buck's view, those residents' questions had already been long-addressed in the contentious debates and exchanges that occurred between Councillors, and residents coming up to the podium in the lead-up to Council's decision to kill the project. Bringing these options back for another review would muddy the waters and further residents' concerns, she said.

‘[Residents] thought it was settled, they thought their interest was protected, and now we're looking for something else that will have the same impact as the neighbourhood designation,’ said Councillor Buck. ‘This is a time for tying up loose ends. This is not a time for starting new directions. The people who fought so hard for us to change our minds relaxed when they thought they had ’ and they worked hard ’ and now they are starting to be concerned again that there is an element on Council who didn't mean what we did.’

The motion was ultimately approved 6 ? 2, with Councillors Buck and Thompson as the dissenting votes.

‘This motion is not looking for anything that would put any onerous restrictions on this neighbourhood,’ concluded Councillor Gaertner. ‘If the intent is to find a way for us to protect the character of this neighbourhood as well as we can, and it is not only for the people who are living in the neighbourhood at the moment. We need to have some way to make it clear for those people who will be moving into the neighbourhood what is and is not permitted.’