

Protections for stable neighbourhoods might not come until March

By Brock Weir

Concrete changes to protect Aurora's so-called stable neighbourhoods might not come to fruition until March, Councillors learned last week.

A possible resolution bringing about concrete changes to protect established communities from large-scale infill development was expected to come forward at the Public Planning meeting scheduled for January 30. But, any decision Council makes that evening will trigger another round of public consultation before it can be ratified, according to staff.

The discussion last week stemmed from a staff recommendation to Council calling on local lawmakers to extend an interim control bylaw by a further year until January 30, 2020.

The interim control bylaw regulates infill development in three Aurora communities identified as 'stable neighbourhoods' including Regency Acres, Aurora Heights and the area surrounding Town Park.

Further talks last week were spurred by delegations from area residents, including John Stinson, who requested an exemption from the interim control bylaw to build a 'small' house replacing the current structure at 29 Church Street, as well as from Peter Smith representing the Regency Acres Ratepayers Association and Neil Asselin, representing the Town Park Area Ratepayers.

While Council voted to refer the matter of 29 Church Street to a future meeting, the ratepayer representatives called for Council to take action and agree on firm measures to protect stable neighbourhoods as soon as possible and reiterated their long-standing call on Council to revise existing zoning bylaws to conform with stable neighbourhood protections outlined in Aurora's Official Plan.

'We have spoken to most of you before the election, we spoke to staff more recently in November and we have met with you, Mr. Mayor, later in November and we have all sort of realised that the interim control bylaw didn't really offer us any protection because we're all left with bylaws that are not conforming to the Official Plan and, therefore, are not protective by nature,' said Mr. Asselin. Mr. Asselin told Council that in talks with Mayor Tom Mrakas that if the recommendations coming from an independent consultant on the best ways to protect stable neighbourhoods are found not to address the ratepayers' concerns that the Mayor would be willing to 'make a motion to change the actual bylaws until such time we're satisfied and can move forward with any compelling bylaws that will address each neighbourhood separately,' said Mr. Asselin.

But, with the report in question not set to be tabled until January 30, Mayor Mrakas questioned Mr. Asselin on the urgency, noting that the January 30 meeting might offer some 'permanent solutions.'

'From what I am hearing is some are requesting we make some changes before we even see that report and then possibly make those permanent solutions,' said Mayor Mrakas. 'We're so close to making those permanent solutions [and I maintain we wait] until that date and if we're not satisfied by that date we can look into alternate options.'

But Mr. Asselin stated that it has taken Council 'close to two years' to figure this out and the report is 'late' coming back to ratepayers for their review.

'We don't know what it is and I understand it could be great ' and, if it is, that's wonderful ' but we also need time to work through it and we need time, as residents, to understand. This is not our profession. We're wading through pages and pages of bureaucracy at the Provincial level and Official Plan'and using terms that we're not accustomed to, so it takes us time to give it some thought.

Because there hasn't been a lot of consultation directly with the consultant who is preparing it, we don't know what to expect and we may need the opportunity to meet with the consultant as well. We just want to make sure we have something protecting us going forward.'

But a resolution is not likely to be in the offing until possibly March.

According to Lawrence Kuk, Manager of Development Planning for the Town of Aurora, any changes that come out of the January 30 Public Planning meeting will be subject to another round of public consultation to allow the public at large the chance to provide input before it comes up for a final vote.

This was information that seemed to take several Council members by surprise, some of whom said they understood that the January 30 vote would hold water.

'My understanding is we have gone through the public process,' said Mayor Mrakas. 'We have developed the process where it is going to be coming to us with options on what changes we would be looking at possibly implementing within this area and so, therefore, our option is similar to any other public planning meeting? We would be making recommendations of possibly moving forward with those options to a General Committee meeting, which means we wouldn't have to fall back to the Public Planning meeting because we have already done three Public Planning meetings. At that moment in time, if we're not happy with some of the

options that are being presented to us, we could possibly look at making some minor changes.?

Not so, said Mr. Kuk, who said the cycle would have to begin again.

?We had a statutory Public Planning meeting in the summer of 2018 and at that point [the meeting was for] the proposed changes from staff?and that meeting had full notice from the Planning Act on what the changes are,? he said. ?Also at that meeting, Council had a tie vote, which was a refusal for those particular proposals, which referred them to where we are today to propose a new set of criteria that the public has not seen yet. It reverts back to the Public Planning Stage.

?On January 30, the purpose of that meeting [is for] Council to direct staff on what they would like to see done as a result of the stable neighbourhoods study. If Council chooses to pass some type of bylaw stating specifically what type of height reduction, lot coverage or whatever other amendments to the actual bylaw, the subsequent public planning meeting would be February 27. We would then present that material to the rest of the population in Aurora to get a chance to comment on those specific changes and after all that, it will be approved or refused or further discussion at General Committee and ultimately enacted at a Council meeting.? Council tentatively approved the extension to the interim control bylaw, a decision which could be ratified at this week's Council meeting.