

Public input sought on Stable Neighbourhoods before March 27 meeting

By Brock Weir

You can now have your say on how the Town can best protect Aurora's stable neighbourhoods.

Members of the public can now take their thoughts online to weigh in on future development in areas designated as stable neighbourhoods around Aurora, which include the neighbourhoods around Town Park, Regency Acres, and Aurora Heights.

Input received online through Place Speak (placespeak.com/stableneighbourhoods), along with suggestions on the future direction of stable neighbourhoods and how Council can best protect and safeguard against developments that do not fit into the neighbourhoods in question, will be compiled ahead of the March 27 Public Planning meeting.

This meeting will be dedicated to new zoning bylaws, currently being drafted, that are intended to bring zoning related to Stable Neighbourhoods in line with provisions in the Town's Official Plan.

The meeting is scheduled for March 27 and I believe one of the recommendations in the Consultant Report [commissioned by Council to come up with independent recommendations on changes to zoning bylaws] was to look at height as well as maximum gross floor area, as well as provide some guidelines, said Town Planner Lawrence Kuk at last week's Council meeting.

While further legislation on infill developments within the Town's three designated stable neighbourhoods is still some three weeks away, Council touched upon things to come last week while approving an exemption to the Interim Control Bylaw put in place to regulate construction within these neighbourhoods until more concrete recommendations came forward.

The exemption pertains to a redevelopment application for 29 Church Street, across the street from the Aurora Cultural Centre.

The owners of the property propose to demolish the existing home and rebuild a two-storey detached for their retirement; a home which must also meet the needs of their daughter who requires a wheelchair accessible home.

The family bought the home in question in 2018, intending to build a home for their retirement but they said they were caught by surprise when the Town enacted the Interim Control Bylaw, after the building was de-listed by Council last July, with the proviso that all future building elevations were subject to a review by Aurora's Design Panel Review and approval of Planning Staff.

Speaking against granting the exemption last week, which would allow the family to advance their plans to review by the Committee of Adjustment, Councillor Wendy Gaertner said timing was everything.

‘We’re so close to finally deciding something at Council

[on Stable Neighbourhoods]

and because this is such an important location?’ I am hoping Council will agree not to make an exception and wait a month before we see what’s coming forward to the Public Planning meeting.’

Councillor John Gallo, who supported the exemption at the Committee level in February, added he had changed his mind, echoing the sentiments of Councillor Gaertner.

‘I took a bit of a deeper look at it, and I wasn’t really sure exactly when we would be coming back to make some decisions on Stable Neighbourhoods and bylaws,’ said Councillor Gallo. ‘I think because of that?’ I would hate to move something forward that in a few weeks time would be contrary to a decision [we] may make. While I don’t like delaying and I know [the family has been to Council] I also don’t know that we would even be passing a bylaw in March. Those are all the variables. To me, it just seems so close and it is worth waiting to see the results of that before we move ahead with this. I wouldn’t feel great if this didn’t end up complying with the potentially new bylaws.’

Councillors Gaertner and Gallo, however, were the only two Council members who voted against allowing plans to move forward to the next stage.

For the five Council members who voted in favour of the exemption, the plans presented were modest and not a ‘monster home’ the Interim Control Bylaw was designed to block.

‘I understand there is another month to go, but that can lead to two months, two-and-a-half months, who knows, but I am not really quite certain what we’re scared of with this particular outlier, as I like to call it,’ said Councillor Rachel Gilliland. ‘They are going to comply with the nine-metre height. Yes, they are across from the Cultural Centre, but the scale of it, I believe, would not be out of place when they are adjacent to a rather large facility.

‘I feel this property is an outlier [in the sense that]?’ it is not typical of what we’re trying to achieve as far as the Monster Homes and the incompatibility of the neighbourhood. I feel this is unfortunate timing for them and an example that perhaps is not the best one to be making.’

A similar view was offered by Councillor Michael Thompson who said Council has already delayed the family's plans once. They have, he argued, shown a willingness to make alterations to their plans in order to comply with regulations.?

?Their intention is to stay and live there and I support their request,? he said. ?All we are allowing them to do is move forward in the process. As the report indicates [it still has to go through] the Committee of Adjustment, there's still Site Plan and a whole number of steps. All we're saying is we're allowing them the opportunity to move forward in that process.?

Added Mayor Tom Mrakas: ?This is going to need a variance regardless, whenever we change our bylaws. We're allowing this to move forward in the process. We're not approving the development. We're not approving the house to be built. All we're doing is we're allowing it to go to the Committee of Adjustment and I think at that time the Committee will make their decision

[on whether]

it meets the criteria. I believe this is the kind of thing you should exempt from the Interim Control Bylaw.?