

Task Force could look at 'lessons learned' from Highland Gate development

Aurora is yet to elect its 2022-2026 Council, but the incoming team of lawmakers may have already received their first assignment: tackling 'lessons learned' from the development of Highland Gate.

Council this month passed a motion from Councillor Wendy Gaertner calling on the next Council to form a task force to review these lessons, following concerns voiced by residents.

'There have been many issues that have and continue to affect residents in the adjacent neighbourhood,' said Councillor Gaertner in her motion. 'The Town will be doing a substantial redevelopment through intensification in existing neighbourhoods and the Highland Gate development can provide us with valuable information and knowledge on how to improve the quality of life for those experiencing construction disruptions going forward.'

While Councillor Gaertner initially sought to have this Council strike the task force, arguing that these lessons needed to be looked at sooner rather than later, it was ultimately agreed to let the new Council pick up this particular task.

'We're going to be experiencing a lot of infill development and certainly this Highland Development is quite unusual and has been going on for many more years than was anticipated by the developer when they came to Council, so we do have to anticipate problems like this with the rest of the infill and development that will be coming,' said Councillor Gaertner.

'I think it is in order to have a committee look at this, just as we have looked at lessons from the Joint Operations Centre, so that we don't make the same mistakes again. In this case, we're talking about quality of life for residents, so it is extremely important that we do have a committee where they look at this carefully and they try to avoid [these] situations for residents of the future when we do the infill development.'

Councillor John Gallo agreed with the sentiment of the motion, but said it should be an issue tackled by the next group of Councillors.

'We need to strike this committee so it is successful and the people who are on the ground and experienced these things firsthand should be on this committee and I also agree that staff should be a part of it,' he said.

Councillor Michael Thompson agreed as well, adding: 'While I appreciate the motion and understand the concerns and am supportive of continual improvement and lessons learned'I think it is more appropriate to be dealt with in the next term.'

But, before a motion was made to amend the resolution to designate this to the next Council term, Councillor Gaertner made one last pitch to have it done now.

'This is a legacy of the last Council,' she said of the Highland Gate development plan. 'I think we should be taking a stand. I would like Council to take some responsibility for what is going on here and pass the motion as is.'

The motion might not have passed as it was, but other Council members encouraged continued dialogue with impacted residents until a committee or task force is ultimately struck.

'I have sat down on many occasions through coffees or just getting together and having those conversations with residents to see if we could correct any of the issues that are occurring as we move through this process,' said Mayor Tom Mrakas. 'Any Councillors are more than free to sit down with residents and I encourage it.'

Added Councillor Rachel Gilliland: 'I know that's a way you can kick-start this and we can make it something that is more official in October with the new term'In the meantime, you could collaborate with a bunch of residents. I have talked with a bunch of

residents over the last few years on various different issues?and seeing if they want to be a part of this committee?there is no reason you couldn't put together a report on some of the lessons learned and receive information that way.

?You can even put it into an agenda or new business item. There are many ways to get that message across.?

Some of the issues cited by Councillor Gaertner in supporting her motion included overgrown vegetation, mud and debris coming off of the construction area onto already established residential properties, dust, and even a sink hole which Councillor Gaertner said formed in a nearby backyard due to the high water table.

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