

Town will look at three potential sites for men's transitional and emergency housing

The Town will explore three potential sites for a new men's transitional and emergency housing building within Aurora, following Council's refusal last month of a proposed site on Yonge Street, just south of Industrial Parkway South.

The decision came following a motion from Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland who presented it at last week's Council Meeting, a second attempt to get it on the table.

"The homelessness crisis is taking a devastating toll on families and communities, undermining a healthy and prosperous way of life," said Councillor Gilliland in her motion, noting "Council accepts that the responsibility to address these challenges rests with community stakeholders, partners and residents, as well as regional, federal and provincial governments."

"The Town of Aurora recently adopted a motion to commit to ending homelessness in the community in collaboration with the Region, and both the Provincial and Federal governments."

Speaking to her motion, Councillor Gilliland said, "Aurora does need to do its part."

"As you are aware, Council did deny an application recently for transitional housing and we are in much need of being proactive in finding a solution for the most vulnerable people in our community. I feel especially as an elected official that it is our job to be proactive in this and offer as much solution and assistance as we can as a municipality. I find some properties of interest since that seemed to be the real root cause of this application being denied was the location."

"This motion, I hope, triggers a plan of action on alternatives sooner rather than later and I am asking my fellow colleagues to support this in doing so as soon as possible so we don't make any delay. The resolution in front of us does ask staff to identify three potential sites for alternative housing in Aurora and to work with York Region staff. I encourage if any Council members have any ideas or recommendations or things they would like to contribute, by all means let's get our heads together and be a part of the solution."

Supporting the motion was Ward 5 Councillor John Gallo who said he had spent "significant time" between the previous week's General Committee meeting, when Council refused to waive procedural bylaw on a two-thirds vote after Councillor Gilliland missed the deadline to have the same motion included on the agenda by a day, considering locations.

"I spent significant time between that meeting and now trying on my own to look at areas of Aurora that could be potential sites for this transitional housing and I have personally identified two," he said. "Should this pass, I will be happy to share those with staff once it gets moving."

While he supported the motion, he said he would have preferred a tighter timeline given the urgency of the matter.

"We're at the end of February and it will be nearly another year gone by," said Councillor Gallo, who was one of the four votes against the Yonge and Industrial site last month. "I would like to see a tighter timeline, perhaps the summer. I don't want to wait until the end of the year to get this going."

The timeline in the motion, said Councillor Gilliland, was suggested to her by staff and CAO Doug Nadorozny added his counterpart at the Region "felt it was going to take some time to come up with three sites the Region was comfortable with."

"It does say before the end of 2024," said Councillor Gallo. "We all spoke of the urgency of this. Those that were even pro or against the particular site. We all spoke to the urgency of this and I just don't want to keep it lingering on. I will do my part to make recommendations that I think are viable."

Although Mayor Tom Mrakas didn't speak to the motion, he supported it ? and subsequently made a suggestion of his own.

As the Town's representative at the Region of York, he has put forward a motion in this capacity calling on Regional staff to ?review all Regionally-owned buildings for the purposes of identifying those that are under and/or unused and provide an analysis of those that can be potentially repurposed for other regional priorities, including supportive housing.?

?York Region has recently adopted a true hybrid work policy where 60 per cent of the staff will work only 50 per cent of their work week on site,? he said in his motion. ?Regional office buildings, including the 422,000 square foot Regional Head Office on Yonge Street will now, as a consequence, have sizable areas of under- and unused taxpayer funded office space available for other purposes.?

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