

Aurora 2035 planning program could help revitalize downtown core

Public consultation will be key in developing the Town's proposed Community Planning Permit System, a streamlined planning process focused on bringing new growth to Aurora's historic downtown core.

The Community Planning Permit System (CPPS) consolidates the Zoning, Site Plan, and Minor Variance applications into one single application and one single permit. The plan is intended to result in timelier approvals on applications pertaining to the historic core with an approval timeline of just 45 days.

Council received a report on the CPPS for information last week which notes that the project will be "informed by public consultation" and developed through the course of the year.

Goals in this consultation process include developing regulations related to land use, height, setbacks, step backs and various other urban design aspects; develop conditions that are required to be met in any new development such as affordable housing opportunities and public art; and to define the target geographic area of the CPPS.

As it stands, the catchment area is Yonge Street from Wellington Street in the north to Church Street in the south. It extends westward to Temperance Street and eastward to Victoria Street, and includes the connecting streets of Mosley and Tyler.

In a social media post following last week's Council meeting, Mayor Tom Mrakas hailed the CPPS as a "significant milestone in our ongoing revitalization efforts" and described it as a "collaborative planning tool, allowing us to work together as a community to create a clear and cohesive vision for Aurora's downtown: Aurora Downtown 2035."

"By implementing a CPPS, we are streamlining the planning process to provide greater clarity, efficiency, and predictability for those looking to invest in our downtown," he said. "It will also simplify approvals for developments that align with the community's vision, ensuring that every new project contributes positively to the area's character and long-term sustainability."

"This is a continuation of our commitment to revitalizing Aurora's downtown, building on recent investments in infrastructure, streetscape enhancements, and business development initiatives. With a clear framework in place, we can ensure that our downtown thrives as a place where our rich history meets a dynamic and prosperous future."

Support was also voiced by Council members at last week's meeting.

Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland said it was a "really good program" that allows the Town to move forward with projects that align with their vision for the downtown. She asked staff what kind of public input they would like to see on design and architectural guidelines. The goal to launch a portal on the Town's Engage Aurora website this month to take in public feedback on the plan was a "good process," she noted.

"I do think it's a good process we're going through and it does allow us the opportunity to set in stone a bit the vision for our community, looking down the road, and certainly putting this in place will allow us to expedite that," she said, seeking assurances that this would be a living document that would continue to be in place no matter who is sitting at the Council table in the coming decade.

Ward 3 Councillor Wendy Gaertner also sought clarification on design and architectural guidelines, but said she wants the CPPS to really foster the development of affordable housing in the downtown area.

"This is something we're going to have to work through as part of the process this year and we will work with that as we engage the public and property owners," said Marco Ramunno, Aurora's Director of Planning. "Yes, when we end up with a final document, we may have conditions where we would want to see a portion of those future units being affordable in some fashion. We would codify

that in this document. That is one of the considerations because Council [has] approved our Housing Action Plan and we have certain policies in our Official Plan. That is going to be one criteria as well.

?The challenge there is the price thresholds and if they can actually be met by new developments because we have gone through this in our Housing Action Plan ? those price thresholds for rent and homeownership [are] a little higher in Aurora and above sort of CMHC rates. It's always a challenge, but it is something we're going to have to work through as part of the process.?

Achieving that goal, Mayor Mrakas added, requires support from upper levels of government.

?At the end of the day, and I think most people are starting to realize that unless we have intervention from the Federal and Provincial government, even Regional government, being able to provide tax dollars to subsidize and bring [these units] below market value, you're never going to achieve that target price of \$550,000.

?The cost of these units are going to be market-driven and the only way to bring it [down] is for us to use tax dollars. It can be done, but we need to have an honest conversation on if that is what we're going to do.?

By Brock Weir