

## Aurora to look at ways to foster affordable housing

**By Brock Weir**

Calls for more affordable housing options in Aurora are frequent, but next month might bring some clarity to just what the Town can do to make it a reality.

Council has deferred a motion from Councillor John Abel for discussion on December 12 which calls for a report back on municipal guidelines pertaining to rental housing stock and how these guidelines can be enforced.

Placed on the last Council agenda, a vote on whether or not to go through with the report was delayed pending an upcoming presentation from York on the Region's Housing initiatives.

Councillor Abel said he brought forward the motion following a recent conference hosted by the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) which made recommendations on how to address an 'affordable housing crisis.'

'It is about our seniors aging in a community that is familiar to them, new families looking for low end rental and kids [wanting to get out on their own],' said Councillor Abel. 'We have approved secondary suites (basement apartments in most cases) but the AMO conference workshops went into much more details and options. I think it is important as we go towards intensification that we adopt and become aware of prioritizing rental units.'

'It is recognized as a shortage, especially in Aurora. We have a lot of our younger people leaving Aurora and heading down to rental units in the city. It is part of our economic development, our sustainable outlook, as well as accommodating people of all incomes.' While Council members said they were all for affordable housing, some questioned the timing of the motion and whether a report on the subject would duplicate work that is already being prepared elsewhere.

According to Marco Ramunno, Aurora's Director of Planning, the Region of York is taking the lead on a housing strategy which will be presented to Council this week. They are, he said, looking at how to develop incentive programs to encourage affordable housing and this has been in collaboration with York Region's nine municipalities.

Regulations are also making their way through the Ontario Legislature which gave members some pause as well.

'I share some of the concern that perhaps it would be best to hold off a little bit and hopefully those regulations will come out soon and then it makes more sense to move forward with it,' said Councillor Michael Thompson, adding that since there is little more than a year left in this Council term that he is reluctant to add much more to the already hefty to-do lists carried by municipal staff. Mayor Geoff Dawe was also in favour of holding off on the motion for a few more weeks.

'If you look at the Growth Plan for the Province for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, it specifically addressed housing,' said Mayor Dawe. 'Upper and single tier municipalities, in consultation with lower tier municipalities, the Province and the appropriate stakeholders will each develop a housing strategy. It is more of a top-down approach as opposed to the bottom up. It would make sense at the very least to wait and hear what the Region comes up with and tells us in a couple of weeks. I think we're all interested in affordable housing and, at the same time, we want to be as efficient as possible.'

For Councillor Abel, however, and indeed Councillor Wendy Gaertner, time is of the essence.

'I am not asking for a lot, but it is better to be a proactive Council, on top of it, so we can learn, that we're aware,' he said, noting the seniors residence Hadley Grange, built over 20 years ago as affordable rentals for seniors, is now facing a waiting list almost a decade long.

Added Councillor Gaertner: 'I would like to thank Councillor Abel; I know his concern over the years has been affordable housing for younger people and we need young adults and beyond in our community. It can't just be for middle [age] and older people. I have two younger people in my family and they could never afford to have a house in Aurora or even a condo. It needs to be looked at.'

'We're a rich community, but we're not all rich. We have to be a complete community in that we try and take care of everybody and not just pay it lip service.'