

Aurora Village weighing options after United Church approval

By Brock Weir

Members of the Aurora Village Ratepayers' Association are weighing their options ? including an appeal to the Ontario Municipal Board ? after Council paved the way for the redevelopment of Aurora United Church and an adjacent retirement complex last week. All options are being considered, said Troy Hourie of the Ratepayers' Association following last week's Council meeting. Ahead of last Tuesday's session, there was contention between the group and Aurora's Clerk's Department after the Ratepayers' requested to make multiple delegations to local lawmakers. However, in the interests of time, and considering the already delegate-heavy agenda, they were asked to keep it to just one speaker.

In the end, that role fell to Mr. Hourie, who asked for a delay in the approval so their concerns could be fully addressed. ?Town Council directed the Planning Department to create a comprehensive report outlining recommendations and options at a future General Committee meeting,? said Mr. Hourie, quoting comments made by Councillors themselves at earlier meetings. ?While there are recommendations, the report only outlines two options for Council to consider. These options are not extensive enough to thoroughly weigh the impact this development will have on the community. The magnitude of allowing so many amendments to the Promenade Plan is such a significant precedent that more consideration must be directed to be sure it is in the best interest of the community.

?We ask each Councillor what options they considered. What are your visions for the Downtown Core? Are you familiar with what is permitted in the Downtown Area, versus the upper downtown core? Have you been provided with correct and thorough information from your planning office, and do you realise that you have approved a design with no concessions on massing??

Questioning what he described as ?Town Council decision-making,? he issued a challenge, calling on all Councillors who voted to approve Aurora United Church's application at the previous week's General Committee meeting to explain why they had changed their minds and how the current design satisfies the requirements of the Aurora Promenade Plan.

?It is shameful that any Councillor could vote to approve this application when the direction they gave was not met,? Mr. Hourie contended.

Another bone of contention, he added, was a still outstanding request from Council calling on the developers and Ratepayers to work together on the remaining issues of height and massing surrounding the plan for the Amica retirement residence.

By last week's Council session, that meeting had yet to take place.

Following initial email exchanges between the developers and the Ratepayers, Mr. Hourie said it had been 32 days since they had heard anything.

In the end, the Ratepayers gave their own requests to Council to ?avoid delay and great expense to everyone.? These included tasking Town Planning staff with reviewing all submissions from the Aurora Village Ratepayers Association in the context of previous Committee recommendations to address ?how the matters have been satisfactorily addressed.?

They also called for Marco Ramunno, Aurora's Director of Planning, to make a peer review of the application immediately available to the Ratepayers Association without charge, that a meeting between planning staff, applicant, residents, and another peer reviewer be immediately held, and a further report summarizing recommendations and potential compromises.

These recommendations gained no traction around the Council table, but members said there is still some wiggle room ahead of the site plan approval later this year.

?I know this is very difficult for you guys and I can hear the passion in your voice and how you have been fighting for what you believe in,? said Councillor Sandra Humfries. ?I respect that very much. I do believe that what is happening tonight is a zoning change. Tweaks to the plan and working together with the developer can still occur. When I look at the vision?I believe it will be a lovely area you will love eventually. I think it is a huge change, it is a massive change, but I do believe it will be the right thing.?