

Better transitions needed to protect stable neighbourhoods from surrounding intensification: Councillor

Better planning rules are needed to ensure there is a clear transition between Aurora's 'Stable Neighbourhoods' and areas of high intensification, according to Councillor Wendy Gaertner.

Councillor Gaertner put forward a motion last week calling for stronger guidelines around the intensification of Aurora's Major Transit Station Areas (MTSAs) - namely areas surrounding the Aurora GO Station - that also abut stable neighbourhoods like the Town Park area.

Existing guidelines, she said, 'do not provide the specificity required to guide decisions on appropriate development' in this particular area and a clear plan was needed for 'area intensification with appropriate transition to adjacent Stable Neighbourhoods.'

'We do have the Promenade Plan, but even the Official Plan consultants said that we need to tighten up or put more in about shoulder areas,' she told her colleagues last week. 'We need to have a more fulsome plan of what we want to see in this area. It is a very important area because of the GO Station and it is a very important area because it borders on a large Stable Neighbourhood.'

While the motion passed Council unanimously, it didn't come without question - including from Councillor Michael Thompson who wanted assurances that going forward any such plan would be carried out in conjunction with work already underway to update the Town's Official Plan and Promenade Plan.

'I see this as a natural result of going through our planning policies and refreshing them as we are doing right now,' he said. 'Certainly, it is very much top of mind and we're cognizant of it both from the Provincial mandate (for intensification) as well as potential applications before us and I would rather go through it in the proper process dealing with it through the Official Plan (OP) and any revisions we make to the Promenade Plan as a result of the OP.'

But given that planning applications are before Council for this area in particular, some Councillors agreed that it was important to have guidelines in place sooner rather than later and rather than waiting for the OP review to be complete.

'We did have some residents come to Council and state their piece about shouldering on Stable Neighbourhoods and pointing to Council on how we're going to protect them and how it shoulders,' said Councillor Rachel Gilliland. 'Councillor Gaertner makes a really good point and while I recognize that intensification should occur [near the GO as part of the MTSA] having those guidelines and how it transitions [to] specifically a stable neighbourhood makes total sense.'

'I don't want the developer wasting their time, planning and staff doing all this hard work, thinking, 'this is a great plan' and then we have pushback? I do think it is important to have some sort of a plan so at least developers and staff have some sort of guideline or some way to address that transition without ambiguity [around what is appropriate]. Right now, it is very confusing as to what is and what's not. I think this is a very helpful tool.'

From the perspective of Town Planner David Waters, developing these guidelines shouldn't be done on its own.

'My preference is to have this type of plan prepared as part of the review of the Promenade Plan because it shouldn't be done in isolation; it should be done together with a review of the policies of the plan so we can prepare a development plan or tertiary plan we can present to Council, which is essentially one way of potentially developing the Promenade. It is not the be all and end all [but] it just shows one version of how we could develop the Promenade Plan based on the policies of the document.'

'We will look at the existing policies regarding interface with the Stable Neighbourhoods and there's even the direction in the current plan regarding environmental protection as well. We will look at those and make improvements to them.'

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter