

Buying parkland would be for the greater good, argue neighbours

By Brock Weir

Neighbours around Aurora's Mavrinac Boulevard said they had more than just a nice house in mind when purchasing their home ? it was all about location.

That is the point they drove home last week, appearing before Council to make impassioned arguments on why Aurora should buy a six acre plot of land in the middle of their neighbourhood. Rather than it being a NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) concern, it is something of which the entire town should sit up and take notice, they argued.

?Council's responsibility includes considering the needs of all Aurora when making these decisions,? said resident Nahla Khouri, of the possibility before Council of exercising their right of first refusal to purchase the land, which residents argue should remain a parkland. ?We think this includes ensuring all of Aurora has equivalent and fair access to properties.

?In our view, the acquisition of the land at issue and its conversion to a park is in the best interests of all of Aurora. If the Town is actually committed to remedying the deficit of parkland as outlined in the [Parks and Recreation] Master Plan, purchasing this particular lot is one of the most financially prudent ways to deliver on that commitment. It will save Aurora money.?

It will be cost effective for Aurora to buy the land for three reasons, she argued. The first is residents through the purchase of their homes, have already contributed \$2 million for Aurora's Cash in Lieu of Parkland. The second is this money has gone into a much larger pot for park purchases. The third, she added, is the agreement holds the purchase price at the land at the time when the agreement was executed, translating into a much better market value.

?It is unlikely any land in Aurora will be available for such a favourable price,? she concluded. ?As such, we believe the Town should acquire this land for the benefit of all Aurora and benefit our subdivision in particular, which has already paid a significant portion of the cost.?

The benefit to Aurora as a whole was a common refrain heard from neighbours in the Council chambers last week. Joining Ms. Khouri earlier in the evening at the podium was Cathy Woods, who underscored what she viewed as a shortfall of parkland overall in the northeast section of Aurora. She also highlighted views expressed during a raucous public meeting held last month that residents believe they could, in the end, be burned, for the ?premiums? they paid to back onto a school or park.

?These families intentionally chose those lots under the belief they would eventually back onto a school or a park,? said Ms. Woods. ?Many of them paid a premium to back onto a future school or park. We understand how the land positioned to us by the builder is not the responsibility of the Town, but it does not take away from the fact our hopes for this land include green space and the Town is in a position to make this happen.

?The bottom line is our neighbourhood needs more parks and it is the right thing to do. A park would provide much needed public space for our community, would best serve the needs of our neighbourhood and would benefit Aurora as a whole. Our neighbourhood specifically is made up of many young families. We chose Aurora as the place where we would build our families and our futures. We want to live in a community that is safe and enjoyable, and this involves having safe public space for our children to play and members of our community to gather.?