

Calls for new highway interchange at St. John's Sideroad renewed at Public Planning

Discussions over plans for a new multi-unit industrial building near St. John's Sideroad and Leslie Street has resulted in renewed calls from Aurora Council for a new highway interchange where St. John's meets Highway 404.

Council members called upon the upper levels of government to take another look at plans and timing for an interchange at last week's Public Planning meeting where local lawmakers reviewed the 24,955.89 square metre proposal.

At the heart of the meeting was a request for a zoning bylaw amendment to permit new uses on the site, including possible banquet halls, clinics, commercial schools, dry cleaners, self-storage facilities, laundromats, motor vehicle shops, recreation centres and more.

Although some Councillors, such as Ward 3's Wendy Gaertner argued that many of these types of businesses should not be permitted in 'prestige' business lands, much of the debate centred on the site's proximity to St. John's and Highway 404 and whether the building plans had anticipated a future interchange.

'The concept that is for review currently right now contemplates the full build out of the site,' said Aiden Pereira of KLM Planning Partners. 'To date, we have received comments from the MTO. They haven't explicitly expressed any interest in terms of a proposed interchange at the 404 at St. John's Sideroad. They have requested that a 14-metre setback be accommodated on that side, which we have accounted for. We're just waiting on more detailed comments from the Region.'

Marco Ramunno, Aurora's Director of Planning, said that the applicant had been requested to provide a 'detailed functional design for a future southbound ramp' and that Council has submitted 'at least half a dozen' resolutions to the Region to make this ramp a reality.

'They don't have it in their current 10-year plan, but it is definitely something they want to protect for, and so do we,' said Ramunno, noting that at a future date an eastern portion of the land will be identified for protection anticipating the future interchange.

'I think it is just a question of when that happens,' he continued. 'The conceptual plan in front of Council is just a conceptual plan; there's no formal site plan application yet, but again, there is still some work to be done here with respect to satisfying the Region's requirement with respect to identifying the actual design of that southbound ramp and particularly how much land needs to be protected and set aside to secure for that future ramp. Timing is still up in the air, but I think the Region and this Council, I am sure, is going to want to protect that future interchange.'

Speaking to the plans before Council, Ward 4 Councillor Michael Thompson said the interchange was the 'crucial point' of the application as it is infrastructure that is going to be needed for Aurora in years to come, 'especially as we continue to grow.'

'Anybody that takes the 404 on a daily basis knows the Wellington intersection is a bit of a bottleneck as it is now and it will only get worse,' said Councillor Thompson. 'We have been advocating for that interchange year after year and personally I would rather see it sooner rather than later, but a little bit of it is out of our hands. My comment is, I just want to make sure that whatever we choose to do here, it does not in any way impede the ability for us to continue to advocate and eventually develop and build that interchange because it's necessary for all Aurorans.'

Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland said she too shared these concerns, as did Ward 6 Councillor Harold Kim who said he wanted the ramp area 'delineated' before approval.

By Brock Weir
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