

?Changing the Way Housing Can Work? to spark discussion on housing crisis



As Aurora considers ways to improve access to affordable housing through the Town's Official Plan, a virtual talk hosted by the Aurora Public Library next week will spark a discussion on the options.

?Changing the Way Housing Can Work? brings former Aurora resident Alex Bozikovic, now architecture critic for The Globe and Mail, back home to ?unpack the housing affordability crisis,? an area explored in his latest book ?House Divided.?

?It has become clear to me in the last few years is what has become clear to a lot of other folks, is the way our cities are growing right now has some significant problems in that people of the next generation are going to be left out,? Bozikovic says. ?House prices have been rising dramatically, not just in Toronto and not just in the most prosperous cities in Canada, but everywhere.

?The ideas are in the air,? he adds, referencing the movement ? YIMBYS (Yes In My Back Yard) out of California ? towards more housing varieties. ?The central idea being that we need to look hard at the policies that shape our built form. We need to look hard at the policies that shape our cities and really ask some hard questions about why we have the rules that we do and what they are accomplishing.?

Bozikovic's family first moved to Aurora in 1980s to find a ?reasonably-sized house and a reasonably-sized yard.? This was an easier objective back then and they landed near the Orchard Heights community.

At that point, he says the nearest corner store was at least one kilometer away and one of his first jobs as a teen was at a grocery store a 45-minute walk away.

?Just surviving in that environment and trying to do anything independently as a teenager was very difficult as the options were very few, they were far apart, and the assumption was everyone would be getting around by car,? he recalls. ?As I was 15 and not driving a car, that kind of assumption and the perceived freedom that comes from driving everywhere has another side: if you don't have a car, you're stuck? and the daily life is not as rich as it might be. It's not just children who aren't able to drive; the opportunities for anybody who can't or doesn't want to drive are very limited in a place like that.

?Some folks in the YIMBY movement have a catchphrase I like, which applies to cities: ?We should make it possible to legalize four floors and corner stores.' It doesn't apply directly to the four corners of Aurora, but the idea that you can create small apartment buildings and also allow for some modest neighbourhood-serving retail I think is an idea that just about everyone can get behind, at least in theory.?

Having higher densities in neighbourhoods makes things more interesting, he argues, and paves the way for businesses to connect with customers and the community.

?The more people you have, the more stuff you're able to deliver and the better it is for business,? he says. ?There is a cultural norm that apartments, even modest collections of apartments, don't belong in 'house' neighbourhoods and somehow they are going to make things worse, or in some way allow the wrong sort of people to live in the neighbourhood. I think that sort of ethos is often not closely examined by people.

?I think it is an idea that has been inherited because, if you think about it, having opportunities for family members to live near you, whatever their stage of life, or whatever their living situation, it is valuable to everyone at some point. Everybody benefits from living in a place where there are opportunities to live in different ways and to move to different places. The oldest parts of Aurora, even the parts that were built up in the 1960s, have a mix of different stuff: a mix of different activities and a mix of different dwellings. To me, those are fundamentally good things that we should be trying to pursue and trying to achieve in our communities.?

To weigh in on the subject, register for [Changing the Way Housing Can Work](#), a presentation followed by a Q&A, by visiting [aurorapl.ca](#). The forum takes place over Zoom Thursday, January 27, from 7 ? 8.30 p.m.

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