

Consultant will advise on next steps on protecting Stable Neighbourhoods

By Brock Weir

A consultant will now provide some impartial advice on how Aurora can best protect its stable neighbourhoods.

Council last week formally approved a notice from Councillor Wendy Gaertner last week to obtain the services of a consultant, expert and experienced in the field of development within mature residential neighbourhoods, to help this ongoing debate come to a resolution.

Council has spent the last eleven months looking into how to strike a balance in protecting Aurora's so-called Stable Neighbourhoods, long-established neighbourhoods like Town Park, Regency Acres, and Aurora Heights, better regulate what residents say is an influx of 'monster homes'.

The debate has gone around in circles with the crux of the issue being the fact that protections for stable neighbourhoods contained within the Town's Official Plan are out of alignment with already-existing zoning bylaws.

'We have been going around and around, backwards and sideways, and I brought this motion forward in October,' said Councillor Gaertner at last week's Council meeting. 'We're coming up [to a year and] we're just not getting anywhere. Maybe, at the end of the day, we'll decide not to protect the stable neighbourhoods; maybe we'll decide to partially protect them, but let's just decide something. The more information we have the better.'

'Let's get an outside voice. The Mayor said last week that maybe it would be a good idea to get somebody impartial to come in because we're just not getting anywhere and we need to do something for the residents.'

The idea of a consultant was supported at the podium by area resident Allison Halls, who said Halton Hills hired a consultant in the past to address this issue and it brought real results for the community and its residents.

'I have read about and witnessed various groups coming to Council and asking for money, or asking the Town to spend money, and they seem to not have any problem getting everybody to agree on something like that, yet here we are: three ratepayers groups representing a couple of thousand homes at least,' she said. 'We have been here month after month asking for a freeze and zoning changes and we can't seem to get that accomplished. It makes me wonder, what is motivating Council not to support us?'

'What that means is since we haven't been able to get a freeze on development to get the zoning bylaw changes before the election, now our only course of recourse is to use our right to vote and to recommend to those who ask us who we would support, who support us in protecting our Stable Neighbourhoods. Hopefully we will have a new group who is willing to support us, do the right thing, and protect the integrity and character of these three Stable Neighbourhoods.'

Of the current group, Councillor Gaertner's motion was supported on a vote of 7 ? 1, with Councillor Paul Pirri being the lone dissenting voice. Councillor Harold Kim was unable to attend last Tuesday's meeting due to illness.

Taking the middle of the road in his arguments, Councillor Pirri said he agreed with Councillor Gaertner that an 'impartial consultant' should be involved, but he was unsure how this impartiality would be ensured.

'Do you go after a consultant who has already worked on these types of developments who are more inclined generally in their mindset to put rules in place to prevent something like this, or do you choose a consultant who typically is against this?' he asked. 'I would feel more comfortable having a report coming back with more information as opposed to a relatively short motion on the agenda saying, let's go out and hire a consultant. I think from a process standpoint that is typically what we would undertake. The flipside to all of that is I don't think it is a bad idea to go out and get a second opinion. I am just more concerned with how do we do that in a practical manner or practical fashion to make sure we get a high quality report at the end of the day.'

Also lukewarm in his response, although ultimately supportive, was Councillor Jeff Thom, who said the idea of 'monster homes' is vague and should be defined before moving forward.

'I find it hard to protect against something if you don't have a clear definition of what that is,' he said. 'I am happy to move forward with a consultant and an expert who is going to look at this and, perhaps, provide some clarity. We really need to look [at the impacts] in a more in-depth way.'

From the perspective of Councillor Tom Mrakas, bringing on a consultant should have been done at the start of this process.

'We talked about the process that many municipalities follow and part of that process is to bring on a consultant to study, put in a freeze with an interim control bylaw and once that study is complete, Council makes a decision to move forward. It is a shame we didn't go exactly down that road, but as Councillor Thompson mentioned, hindsight is 2020.'

'I understand your concerns but at the end of the day, all of us around here have stated we want to protect our stable neighbourhoods. In essence, we would be looking for someone to inform us on the best way to protect our stable neighbourhoods. I

don't know why we want to get someone to tell us how not to protect our stable neighbourhoods.?