

Costs of renovation program requested by Council before final decision

Council has requested a full costing of potential programs to protect local renters from 'renovictions' before making a final decision on next steps.

Local lawmakers last week considered a recommendation from Town Staff against proceeding with developing an anti-renoviction bylaw citing cost concerns regarding enforcement.

The motion to look further into what Aurora can do to prevent local renters against renovictions was first brought forward by Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese, who said the report lacked the clear numbers to back up the concerns.

Weese brought forward a successful amendment to the motion asking for full administration costs to come before Council by the end of the month for consideration.

The request followed a series of delegations to Council from renters supporting the motion as they feel they could soon be subjected to renovictions themselves.

'For many of us, these buildings are not just rental units, they are our homes, our community, our stability,' said Nada Ismail, a resident of 14 Wellington Street of more than 20 years, a building that faces extensive renovations. 'We have raised families here, cared for aging parents here, and built our lives around this neighbourhood. The uncertainty surrounding redevelopment has created enormous anxiety. We do not know when eviction notices may come and what the timelines will be, or whether we will have any ability to remain in Aurora once this process begins.'

Ismail said that designs show her long-time home will be eliminated as part of the renovations and she's not alone in this.

'As our respected Mayor and Councillors, I ask you honestly - is this the reputation you want for Aurora? A Town where long-standing residents who have contributed to this community for decades are pushed out because there are no protections in place? Aurora has always been a community that values its residents. A renoviction bylaw would stop that development and it would ensure that redevelopment does not come at a cost of pushing out the very people who built this community. It would give tenants a fair chance to stay in their homes and protect the diversity and stability of our neighbourhoods.'

'Please adopt a renoviction bylaw that protects Aurora's residents from displacement disguised as demolition. We want nothing more than to remain in this Town we love and we continue contributing to the community we call home.'

Ismail was joined at the podium by her neighbour, William, who described himself as a senior stroke-survivor on a fixed income.

'Without stronger protections, seniors like me are pushed into homelessness,' he said.

Fellow neighbour Nate added that the property is where he and his children have built their lives.

'This Town is our home. It's the community that shaped my kids. The place that they made their friends and where we built our lives. We have not been served an N-13 notice yet, but we see the direction things are heading. And we know how vulnerable we are without stronger protections,' he said. 'If our building is classified as demolition, my family will have no right to return. With today's rental prices, we simply cannot afford to stay in Aurora. For us, a renoviction wouldn't just mean finding a new place to live. It would mean being forced out of the town we love. It would mean pulling my children away from their school, their teachers and friends they've grown up with. It would mean losing the stability and the support networks that my family needs. I worry every day about how I would explain to my kids we have to leave the only community that we've known.'

While Councillor Weese stressed the importance of getting accurate costing back, he also underscored the importance of the bylaw

itself.

"This isn't a trivial thing, it's life altering for [the delegates] and all the other renters in this community," he said. "If we believe that the statistics are there, that's 19 per cent of our population who are residents who live in rental units - that's 12,300 people who at some point could learn that their landlord wants to improve his property, which means to renovate it, to increase rents, and should the existing tenant not be able to or want to and can't afford to wait, or can't afford those increased costs, this, again, is life-altering. They could be on the street, looking for other affordable accommodations, which can be in the supply chain for rental units.

"This is really at the heart of any renovation law. It's not designed to restrict landlords from renovating or ask for reasonable increases in rent as is provincially mandated. We have a Landlord and Tenant Board that does that all the time. It's designed to allow renovation and improvements for landlords, but not to evict tenants for an extended period of time, nor ask for unreasonable rent increases or prevent the existing tenant to return from their home, which is the crux of the problem."

The Province, he added, has been working on a renovation bylaw for two years now, but there is an urgency behind it, he added.

"The cost of administration of this issue is not for staff to decide - it's for Council to decide," he concluded. "We have evidence before us of a problem that immediately affects six families and units, and likely another 20 very soon. Without proper communication to our renters in Town, there may be more than we are aware of. I'm reminded of the phrase originally by Nicholas Butler, who is the president of Columbia University, who stated, the population of nations may readily be divided into three groups: those who make things happen, many more that watch things happen, and the overwhelming majority have no notion of what is happening. I prefer us in Aurora to be a group who makes things happen, not watch things happen or wonder what happened."

By Brock Weir
Editor
Local Journalism Initiative Reporter