

# Council leaves window to get 'creative' after residents shoot down Heritage District

**By Brock Weir**

Neighbours will have to wait nearly three more weeks to find out whether or not a Heritage Conservation District in their community will proceed to the next steps.

Nearly 200 residents from Aurora's downtown southeast quadrant filled Council Chambers on Wednesday evening to sound off on the pros and cons of a Heritage Conservation District which is proposed be bordered roughly by the north side of Wellington Street East on the north, Rotary Park to the South, Berczy Street to the east and Victoria Street to the west.

The Special Council meeting gave Councillors a further opportunity to hear firsthand from residents and property owners in the area on why they would or would not like to see a Heritage Conservation District (HCD), and everything that comes with it, implemented on their properties.

It was also an opportunity for consultants and Aurora's legal department to address concerns that have become part of the debate - legitimate concerns to some and 'fear mongering' to others - on restrictions that might be coming their way.

Response from over 40 speakers who came to the podium was largely negative, with many speaking out against any further restrictions on their homes or properties, with those in favour saying they believe it will foster a sense of security for the neighbourhood.

The negative response, however, provided plenty of food for thought and Councillors opted to make a final decision on whether or not to proceed, targeting the General Committee meeting of May 20 as the tentative decision day.

For some Councillors, the negative response was overwhelming and a recommendation from staff simply to receive the comments, effectively hitting the pause button on the entire process, was something that should have been done right then and there.

'We have heard the unanimous support for maintaining the character of this neighbourhood,' said Councillor Evelyn Buck. 'We can stop designation [but] we don't have to stop looking for ways and means of satisfying everyone with doing whatever is possible under the planning act to protect the character of this neighbourhood.'

'At this point, I can think of no new information that can be presented by staff to this Council that will make any difference in anybody's minds. All the work has been done, all the questions have been asked, and all the answers have been given. The people have asked us to make a decision tonight and there is no more input that can be made. There is nothing more that can be said.'

Mayor Geoffrey Dawe expressed a similar viewpoint, although he said he was 'struggling' with the decision as he wanted staff to come back with more answers to the questions put to Council by members of the public that evening.

'I don't see anything changing between now and then,' he said. 'I think we will get some detailed answers from staff in terms of these issues, but I don't know what we can go to the public with on this. In my opinion, there is too much polarity on this item and I don't see a positive result out of that polarity.'

Mayor Dawe and Councillor Buck were the only two voting against a motion to bring everything together at the General Committee meeting later this month. For those voting in favour of the motion, pausing things last week would have been a 'cop out' and would not have resolved any questions on whether the HCD was dead or could be revived in short order.

'We have a responsibility to deal with this and deal with it soon,' said Councillor Chris Ballard. 'If we stop this process now, let's stop it. If we're going to continue, let's continue. Let's not just sweep it under the rug. Let's make a decision. I would like to see a

staff report come back to General Committee as soon as possible so we, as Council, can continue to deal with this question and not sweep it under the rug. Some will hope we forget it and others will be frustrated we didn't do anything.?

Others voted in favour of giving a few weeks' window to make a final decision following up from a suggestion made at the podium from former councillor Damir Vrancic that the best way forward is to look for 'creative ways' to address everyone's concerns, sidestepping all the thorny issues that can come up with a blanket designation on an entire community.

'A heritage district should be something that is a source of pride for the neighbourhood and the community and so far people have indicated they support heritage designation to certain degrees, but moving forward might cause more bitterness and division than cohesion and pride,' said Councillor Michael Thompson on looking for more creative solutions.?

Added Councillor Sandra Humfryes: 'I think it is worth another viewpoint coming forward and voting on it at the next GC.?'