

Council presses ahead to secure Mavrinac Blvd land from developer

By Brock Weir

Aurora has formalized plans to press a local developer on securing a six acre piece of land for potential parkland.

Councillors ratified a decision made in closed session last week to exercise its right of first refusal on the Mavrinac Boulevard land after the York Catholic District School Board (YCDBS) gave up its hold on building a school on the site.

The subdivision agreement in question between the Town of Aurora and Minto Communities outlines if the land was not used by the YCDSB, the Town would have first right of refusal to purchase the land at a previously agreed to price.

Following closed session talks, Councillors resolved to direct Town Solicitor Warren Mar to "arrange an agreement of purchase and sale" on the land "based on the terms and conditions, including purchase price that Minto agreed to sell the property to the York Catholic District School Board."

Going forward to Council, some Councillors still expressed misgivings on what was on the table with Councillor Michael Thompson arguing it should be clearly spelled out that such a purpose would be for the sole use as a parkland rather than general municipal purposes.

"It is important residents clearly understand what the intent is of all of us who are voting for the purpose of the property and there should be no ambiguity," said Councillor Thompson.

According to Marco Ramunno, Aurora's Director of Planning, leaving the resolution up to "municipal purposes" would not only cover a park and things like soccer fields, but it would also leave the door open to municipal buildings.

Some Councillors, including Councillors Chris Ballard, Wendy Gaertner and John Gallo, were content leaving things as is as "municipal purpose" is what is outlined in the existing subdivision agreement and changing that could "muddy the waters."

"My preference would be to stick to what the subdivision agreement says," said Councillor Gallo. "A park fits within those parameters. In order not to muddy the waters [and] amend this to be specific in what we want to do with it, I think we need to adhere to what the subdivision agreement says."

Added Councillor Ballard: "There will be plenty of time as this moves along to be more specific, or for future councils to be more specific about a park. Right now I think we're still at the 35,000 foot level in terms of just exercising our rights."

Joining Councillor Thompson in supporting the motion to get more specific were Councillors John Abel, Sandra Humfries, and Paul Pirri. For them, being specific with their intentions sent the right signal to the residents in what their intentions were for the contentious site.

"It provides clarity," said Councillor Humfries. "From a communications perspective with residents it doesn't muddy the waters for me."

This was a similar view expressed by Councillor Abel.

"It clearly indicates to residents I am in favour of a park and I think it is important to do that because we know we can use cash in lieu," he said. "If we say it is for something not a park, then we might not be able to use those funds and that could jeopardize the whole purpose."

Despite the motion falling on a recorded vote, with Mayor Geoffrey Dawe voting against it, the original motion to move forward in flexing its muscle in exercising the right of first refusal went forward. If the intent was not to muddy the waters with the previous motion, the holdouts were still not satisfied with the motion on the table "particularly leaving things to the next term of Council to

get down to the details on the land's future use.

‘Actions speak louder than words,’ said Councillor Thompson. ‘It is easy to say this is what your vision is, but if you don't have a purpose in mind for this property now and aren't willing to put it out there with the motion, then it might not be in alignment with what the residents have been communicating and have been advocating for.

‘I don't think residents are going to get what they think they are going to get when this all unravels after the next election.’

Although Mayor Geoffrey Dawe voted in favour of the recommendation, he made it clear his interest is not necessarily in building a park in the area but maintaining the integrity of Aurora's agreements after representatives from Minto indicated they would put up a fight arguing Aurora had no right of first refusal as outlined in the subdivision agreement.

‘I believe the Town is obligated to enforce this particular clause in the subdivision agreement to protect the integrity of our agreements,’ said Mayor Dawe. ‘I never said I support this being a park. I support what we need to do and that is to protect the integrity of our agreements.’