

Councillor 'regrets' vote on men's transitional housing proposal

One of four Aurora Council members who voted against a plan to build a new Regional men's emergency and transitional housing building in Aurora's south end is now expressing regret about his decision.

In March, following Council's decision to deny an application for the proposed building on a Regionally owned plot of land on Yonge Street, just south of the railway bridge, lawmakers tasked staff to work with the Region to find alternative sites in Aurora to make the building a reality.

Now, nearly eight months later, with no alternatives yet to hit the Council table, Ward 5 Councillor John Gallo says the lack of concrete action is making him 'regret' his decision.

'I voted against the location [in Aurora] for a very specific reason, none of which had to do with the need, the urgency and all of that type of facility [and] time it is taking to either find a Plan B or go back to the original idea,' he told Council last week. 'I am sitting here and the amount of time it is taking, I am regretting my decision of what we made back then. If I had known it was going to take this long, I probably would have changed my mind.'

The Councillor kicked off the discussion during the New Business section of the October 22 Council meeting when he asked staff for updates on the file.

'I updated Council about six weeks ago regarding the interaction we've had with the Region of looking for other sites ' the process is still in their hands,' said Aurora CAO Doug Nadorozny. 'Our staff are working with Regional staff. They're taking a very full approach to the whole Region and looking at other homeless-related projects they had in mind. We're still, at this point, waiting for some more feedback from the Region.'

When asked by Councillor Gallo whether there was a timeline for a list to come back, Nadorozny replied, 'We're really at the mercy of York Region.'

'This is their project and their initiative,' the CAO continued. 'They haven't indicated a deadline they're working towards. In fact, they seem to have sort of gone back and looked at the whole homelessness portfolio.'

It was a 'disappointing' update, the Councillor continued, suggesting Mayor Tom Mrakas, the Town's voice at the Regional Council table, ramp up the 'pressure.'

'Let's figure this out,' he said. 'Everybody was screaming, 'urgency, urgency, urgency,' and I am starting to regret my decision.'

Mayor Mrakas responded that Housing York, the Region's housing arm, and 'everyone sitting at the table in York Region' has shared the same concerns.

'The comments from the Region when they presented [the proposal] that evening was there was no Plan B at the time,' said the Mayor. 'I can tell you that everyone, staff at the Region, are looking at a Region-wide approach and looking at all possible land and vacant properties the Region owns, which we just got a report on.'

The report also looks at properties that have existing buildings on-site that could be redeveloped, he noted.

'We're going through that process right now. Hopefully as we continue to go through the budget process and we get a more fulsome report on what each of those highest and best uses of those properties are'right across the Region, we will be able to move forward quickly at that point.'

Last word went back to Councillor Gallo, who said he was sure Council agreed it was 'taking way, way too long.'

'It's not easy and I am not suggesting it's easy, but it boggles my mind that the urgency we expressed, and we're looking at nearly two years since that project at least came to site, and still nothing ' and not only nothing, but there is nothing in site.'

Council originally tasked staff with finding alternative locations at the February 27 Council meeting following a motion from Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland.

The motion called for 'three potential viable sites for alternative housing in Aurora and report back to Council before the end of 2024.'

The motion passed Council unanimously 6 ' 0, with Ward 6 Councillor Harold Kim absent from the vote.

By Brock Weir