

Councillor urges re-think on garages, outbuildings to help families provide for seniors, young adults

As families look at in-home senior care or face the reality of their kids returning unable to afford a home of their own, detached garages and other buildings on-site could offer some temporary or permanent solutions.

This is at the heart of a motion from Councillor Rachel Gilliland that will be up for Council's consideration last week. As the Town continues its work to update Aurora's Official Plan, new policies should consider allowing 'accessory buildings' to be used as secondary units where appropriate, she says.

'Inflationary pressures are hindering the ability for young adults to rent or buy a home outside of their parents' home and in-home senior care is on the rise due to rising costs, health and safety and/or lack of availability,' says Councillor Gilliland in her motion. 'The Province is facing a major housing crisis and if our local municipality has enabling policies within its Official Plan and Zoning Bylaw, it would allow a second unit within a home plus an additional unit on a residential property.'

The motion, if approved by Council this Tuesday, would direct staff to explore just such enabling policies, identify appropriate locations, and propose zoning amendments to existing policies.

'Since last summer, I have received some calls and emails, and from knocking on doors as well, and not everybody necessarily has the second suite option within their home,' says Councillor Gilliland, referencing suites that often take the form of basement apartments. 'There are a couple of different scenarios: the under 30-year-old young adults are back at home living in the basement because inflation has skyrocketed and the cost of living is through the roof. These guys just can't afford their first home, they can't afford the rent and [buying a home] has become extremely unattainable. Not a lot of people have room in their house or the ability to expand on their house, whatever the circumstances are.'

'The second scenario is senior care. Often I have come across the same situation where if it is not your young adults living in your basement, you have a challenge where we're now looking after our parents who are elderly, need care, and either they can't afford to put them in a for-profit retirement home because they are expensive or they don't qualify for subsidized long-term care, or perhaps they don't want to be in any kinds of homes due to lockdowns, loneliness and the high risk of infection. The accessibility becomes an issue when you're within that home and where you're placing your parent within that home.'

For some, she says, taking a second look at accessory buildings on your property might be the only option.

If her motion is successful, the result could align with similar policies put in place by Innisfil and include a range of buildings from detached garages to pool cabanas, she says.

'This is intended to identify where it would be appropriate,' says Councillor Gilliland. 'I am not asking for a blanket statement that anybody who has a property could put an accessory building [on site] and start putting parents or children in there. That's not the point; it is a point of where it is appropriate, the process [such as] parking, garbage and whatnot. It is a very responsible and respectful way to help families care for their loved ones, whether it is their parents or their children, get on their feet.'

'All I am trying to do is give options to families where they feel stuck, that they have no other option, but feel it would be a good option for care. There's nothing worse than feeling like you have a mother or a father who is physically challenged and can't do stairs, but you simply just don't have room in your house. You don't want to be expanding or putting an addition on your house, but you have that accessory dwelling that would definitely serve the same purpose. Why not have those enabling policies in place? Once those places are identified, it makes it seamless and easier. You're removing the red tape and there are more immediate options for those families other than feeling you're in limbo.'

'A lot of times the situation and circumstances are not planned. No one really plans when a family member gets sick, nobody plans

when there's mobility issues, no one plans for when a child comes home suddenly. We need to be able to remove the municipal gatekeepers in order to ensure we have options for these families.?

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