

Councillor wants to cut 'frustration' over notifying residents

If there's an issue in Aurora impacting your neighbourhood, do you just hear about it after the fact?

If that answer is yes, there might be some relief to your 'frustration.'

Last week, Council approved a motion from Councillor Wendy Gaertner tasking staff with looking at how they can improve their communication with residents in various areas, including how the public is notified about road reconstruction projects, minor variances that appear before the Town's Committee of Adjustment, and when developers request changes to already-approved site plans.

'Resident dissatisfaction has been expressed on lack of communication in some cases,' said Councillor Gaertner in her motion. 'This has engendered frustration, sometimes anger, at not being informed. The Town has a responsibility to ensure residents receive information on construction, planning and Committee of Adjustment matters that may affect them.'

'These are concerns that we have heard the last year from the public about the Public Planning process or the Committee of Adjustment Process - it is all about information and going out to residents [with] appropriate information and appropriate timing,' said Councillor Gaertner at last week's meeting. 'I would like to say to staff that we had a situation a couple of weeks ago where we had a planning application come to General Committee [regarding a proposed apartment building on the northeast corner of John West Way and Wellington] and it had been a couple of years since we last looked at it.'

'Council felt the items should be deferred so that there would be plenty of time to notify residents in case they wanted to come and make comments to us.'

The motion was unanimously approved by Council, with questions directed to Carley Smith, the Town's new Manager of Corporate Communications, on plans that might be in the works to improve the communication process.

'We have processes in place as a result of the Ontario Planning Act and so forth, but always we can work with how we're communicating with residents and see if we can do better,' said Councillor Michael Thompson.

Ms. Smith said she is 'happy' to work with Planning and compile a summary of the current situation and how the processes can be improved.

Councillor Rachel Gilliland said that having a review on how they can 'do better' is welcome.

'The more that we can link together different avenues and different kinds of media - I know we already go above and beyond with the Ontario Planning Act and what we're supposed to be doing, but I think this is going to give us some added measures,' said Councillor Gilliland. 'I look forward to seeing what Ms. Smith can bring that will be a little more innovative and help bring that reach to the community.'

Added Mayor Mrakas: 'We can always look at updating our current processes and how we can make them better and more transparent, and make ourselves more accessible to our residents and make sure they get all the information they need to stay informed of what is going on.'

'I look forward to the report coming back to us and I am sure we're going to have a long discussion when that process actually gets in front of us and I am looking forward to that.'

By Brock Weir
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