

Councillors opposed to Housing Pledge question whether it will bring results or 'chaos' to community

At last week's Council meeting, lawmakers opposed to Aurora's newly-approved Housing Pledge, which will see the community move towards a goal of 8,000 new housing units by 2031, questioned whether the goal would achieve results, or whether it would just result in 'chaos' across Aurora.

Council passed the pledge on a vote of 4 ? 3 but, throughout discussions Councillors raised concerns about whether the 8,000-unit goal was realistic and the longer-term impacts of that might come from continual construction.

'I think a pledge is a serious thing,' said Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese, kickstarting discussions, and citing a plan for 8,000 new residential units by 2051 included in the Town's new yet-to-be-approved Official Plan. (OP) 'I am not against controlled growth in our Official Plan? a process of public consultation that is now in its third year.

'I think anybody at this table would be happy to approve anything that comes forward that works with the OP? I support what is needed and affordable, yet I don't see anything in this pledge that remotely discusses the need and the strategy for purpose-built rentals? or residences that are affordable.

'30 pieces of silver' offered by the Provincial government for us to build, build, and build more. I object to it and I will never support anything that affects our local municipal control.?

Continuing discussion against adopting the Housing Pledge as written was Ward 5 Councillor John Gallo who said Aurora would have 'a real tough time achieving this pledge.?

'There are certainly arguments that if you don't vote for this you're potentially leaving money on the table because the Province is waving this big carrot in front of us and I have a big issue with the way the Province has conducted themselves,' he said, referring to financial incentives put forward by the Province that would reward municipalities like Aurora on how they hit their housing targets.

He added he would not be voting in favour of the Housing Pledge in any event because he believed, from the Province's perspective, going forward was 'inextricably linked' to the granting of so-called Strong Mayor powers that will see the many Heads of Council across Ontario this fall receive additional powers to override Council decisions.

'For anyone to suggest this program that has been put in place by the Provincial government is going to build affordable housing it is complete BS. I am sorry, but it is. Look around you right now in the Town of Aurora ? one two-bedroom condos are between \$600,000 and \$800,000. We're going to take people [sleeping under a] bridge, sleeping on the streets, and put them into a \$500,000 - \$800,000 condo? How can they possibly afford that? This is not a solution to that. It will not be a solution to that. I just can't believe we keep saying these things that are simply not true and will not happen. Developers will not be building the stuff because it is not profitable. I don't know how else we can say that.?

Ward 3 Councillor Wendy Gaertner said condensing what was a planned target of 8,000 homes by 2051, as contained in the Draft OP, into a seven-year window to 2031 would cause long-term impacts beyond the Council table.?

'I can't imagine the chaos this will cause the residents,' she said. 'It will have a terrible impact on their quality of life, drastically change the character of the Town, and in 30 years?you get used to change, but to have that all happen so quickly, I don't believe the residents of the Town want that. I believe I was elected to try and do what the residents want, what the residents need, and this is definitely not what the community wants or needs, from all the feedback I received.

'People have talked about leaving money on the table. Well, if we are able to do 1,000 units a year, we'll get \$2 million. If you put that into the context of everything that these new people are going to need, as was mentioned? the Parks and all of the services the

new residents are going to need, two million a year is really not going to help very much. Even if we try to build 8,000 units, with the shortage in the trades, young people are not going into the trades, the real shortage in the supply line of construction material caught up for a little bit, but as soon as we start doing this building it is going to be short again.?

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter