

Councillors take another crack at Mavrinac ?park?

By Brock Weir

Residents fighting for parkland in northeast Aurora could get some clarity this week on the future of a six acre piece of undeveloped land at the eye of a storm between neighbours, Council, and developers.

Councillors are expected to go into closed session once again at this week's General Committee meeting to discuss details surrounding the possible acquisition of the lot by the Town.

The land in question, located on Mavrinac Boulevard, was originally earmarked for a new school for the York Catholic District School Board since 2007. More recently, however, the Catholic Board changed directions and ruled they no longer needed the land for future use. Under the terms of the subdivision agreement, however, developers now need to offer the Town of Aurora the right of first refusal.

Matters came to a head in the middle of October at a public information session hosted by Councillor John Gallo with the purpose of getting residents up to speed on what had transpired up to that point ? as much as possible, as many of the details surrounding any potential land purchase, including price, were still bound by closed session confidentiality.

Nearly 60 people from the surrounding community attended the session, voicing various degrees of frustration including a lack of information coming forward from Council, as well as the feeling of being ?misled? by developers as they had, in some cases, bought the properties they had ?at a premium? to back onto either a school or parkland.

?It's Council's call on whether or not they want to go into open session,? said Warren Mar, Solicitor for the Town of Aurora, when Council last discussed the matter on October 15. ?I think it is best if Council heard that confidential information first.?

The majority of Councillors opted to hear what Mr. Mar had to say in closed session and make information public thereafter. Councillor Wendy Gaertner, however, disagreed.

?This item should not be in closed session and should never have been in closed session, and I do not want it to go in closed session in any way to discuss it,? she said.

After considerable time spent in closed session, Councillors voted to allow Mr. Mar to release some information to the public.

?[Property owner] Minto had reserved that block for the proposed school for the York Catholic District School Board,? said Mr. Mar. ?That reserve was part of the subdivision plan from 2007 and discussions were ongoing with the school board and Minto.

?Recently, the school board has decided they do not wish to purchase the property. Contained in the subdivision agreement between Minto and the Town, there is the right of first refusal for the Town to purchase that property. Currently, the Town and Minto are engaged in discussions with regards to that purchase. Right now, nothing is before Council or the Town with regards to planning applications or plans for development. The only discussions that are taking place is whether or not the Town wishes to purchase that particular piece of property. That is the discussion that was had in closed doors, the contents of which I am not going to disclose to the public.?

Commenting on Mr. Mar's statement, Councillor Michael Thompson said residents might feel there is a sense of ?urgency? on the future of the land. Mr. Mar replied that that is not the case in that a decision needs to be made within weeks. The ball is back in Minto's court, he added, suggesting a further deferral to this week's General Committee meeting for the developer to respond.

?There is still time for Council to make a decision and, if it so wishes, have discussions out in public once they have all the details from Minto,? he said.

When Councillors meet this week, debate is expected to continue. In addition to the closed session item, the agenda includes a notice of motion from Councillor Gallo. It calls on Council to exercise its right of first refusal outright on the Mavrinac Land.

The subdivision agreement states that the owner [Minto] agrees to provide the Town of Aurora a first right of refusal to purchase [the land] upon the same terms and conditions including, but not limited to, the purchase price of the site as set out in its agreement with the York Catholic District School Board.

He calls on Council to exercise [The Town's] first right of refusal as outlined in the subdivision agreement and purchase the property offering the purchase price as set out in its agreement with the York Catholic School Board; and that the Town release all non-solicitor client privileged material provided to Council during all closed sessions regarding this issue.

If the motion remains on the agenda this week, a decision could be made as early as November 12.