

FRONT PORCH PERSPECTIVE: Protecting our existing neighbourhoods

By Stephen Somerville

I was reading last week's edition of the Auroran and spied editor Brock Weir's article about the issue of protecting the unique characteristics of our neighbourhoods and thought that I would weigh in on this topic.

We have seen three slightly different variants on this general issue play out in our communities over the last number of years. First, we saw the issue with Glenway in Newmarket and with the Aurora Highlands Golf Course in Aurora. In both cases, private developers bought the club and existing land from the golf course owner with the intention of erecting town houses, single dwelling homes and in the case of Aurora, a 10 storey apartment complex.

In both cases, the home owners in the local area banded together to form rate payers association and in both cases, the private developers appealed to the Ontario Municipal Board. And again, in both cases, while cutting back slightly on the number of dwellings, the respective developments moved ahead.

Second, and although it is different, remember a number of years back when Aurora Council was dealing with the potential installation of a 400 MW natural gas generation peaking facility near Bloomington road in the southern part of Aurora?

The issue here was one of safety, noise and property values.

And now we have the third which is protecting the character of existing neighbourhoods from monster homes.

I can partially see where the provincial government is coming from in the first two instances.

Regarding the real estate development issue, the Places To Grow Legislation that the former McGuinty government put in place in 2005 ascribed intensification targets for our towns and cities.

This makes general sense as we need to accommodate further population growth in our province and every community has to do their respective share in accepting more folks.

But what I find different about this situation is that Aurora, from what I could tell at the time, was meeting its mandated interim intensification targets and Highland Gate is a mature community.

If the Town is meeting these targets, then locally elected officials should have ultimate say over zoning and planning within Aurora. Regarding the placement of an energy project, as someone who has been developing various types of power projects across Canada and the United States (natural gas, land fill gas, and wind) as well as the transmission lines and natural gas pipelines associated with these power projects, I see a parallel.

The province is ultimately responsible for seeing that the lights stay on in the province.

The province has now put in place regional committees to dealing with electricity planning so that a coordinated approach can be made to ensure that communities have adequate energy supply. This also means ensuring that communities understand the resulting trade-offs ? including cost - between alternatives, like having local generation or large local transmission lines.

I do agree that something has to be done to protect the sanctity of our community.

We need to respect the ambience and character of our existing neighbourhoods. People who buy into these streets should be given some latitude if they are tearing down and building a new dwelling or enlarging an existing home, but not be given carte blanche to do what they like.

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