

FRONT PORCH PERSPECTIVE: Stable Neighbourhoods Open House

By Stephen Somerville

Last month, I attended the Public Open House at the Council Chambers in the Aurora Town Hall regarding the Existing Stable Neighbourhood Study.

It was a well-attended event; I estimate over two hundred people participating.

The event was scheduled to run from 7 pm to 9 pm. I stayed until about 8:30 pm.

For those of you who may have missed the reason for the Open House, the study document states "The Town of Aurora initiated a stable neighbourhood study to examine whether the Town's Zoning By-law is effective in maintaining the character of our existing residential neighbourhoods."

It goes on; "The Town of Aurora invites you to a Public Open House that will feature a presentation on the existing Official Plan policy and Zoning By-Law and we are seeking your input about how neighbourhood character can be regulated."

"This is a great opportunity for residents to express what improvements or changes they would like to see to the Town's Zoning By-law in order to protect the character of our existing neighbourhoods."

The map on the back of the Open House document shows three main study areas. Living on Hill Drive, I am in the middle of the study area bounded by Bathurst, Wellington West and Yonge Street.

This has become an important topic in our community. I can't recall a local issue in the last couple of years that has drawn so many letters to the editor.

In addition to this study, the Town Council has instituted a one-year moratorium on new residential builds that currently exceed development standards.

Back to the actual meeting.

Town staff first made a ten minute power point presentation to provide background and context for the discussion to come.

The intention was then to split the room up into smaller groups so that everyone could provide feedback to a moderator/scribe, who then would report back to the entire group.

However, one lady spoke up and said that she would like to hear what everyone had to say and she suggested that the group remain in the Council Chambers.

This was agreed to.

Anyone who wanted to say something or ask a question then was given the opportunity to do so.

A lot of people spoke up.

Some read from notes, others spoke very well extemporaneously while others had questions.

What most people had in common was a frustration aimed at a particular monster home or major renovation in their respective neighbourhood.

Lots of valid points were raised regarding set-backs, heights of dwellings, privacy issues and the simple enjoyment of one's property.

I submit that the vast majority of those in the room don't believe the Town's Zoning By-law is effective in maintaining the character of our existing residential neighbourhoods.

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.

There needs to be some strict limits on height and the size of dwelling. Also, some real protections need to be put in place to guarantee the rights of the existing homeowners to sunshine on their property and to the general enjoyment of their own property, among others.

During the time that I was in attendance, we only heard from one person who was doing a rebuild (although I was told that there were a few developers in the room), but the gentleman said that his new structure was in keeping within the existing development standards.

The session organizers were busy taking notes. I am quite interested to read the Town staff recommendations that come out of these discussions.

Stephen can be contacted at stephengsomerville@yahoo.com