

Gaertner apologises to area renters following Council comments

By Brock Weir

Councillor Wendy Gaertner issued an apology at the Council table last week after comments made earlier this month raised the ire of local renters.

The Councillor made her initial comments at the previous week's General Committee during a discussion on feedback related to the ongoing issue of how to protect Aurora's 'stable neighbourhoods' from infill developments that might be out of place with the buildings around them.

Referring to public feedback received online through Place Speak, an online forum where Aurora residents can register their concerns on myriad issues, Councillor Gaertner said while comments were continuing to roll in, some comments should be given greater weight than others.

'It seems to me, but I don't know, that there are a lot of renters weighing in, and I don't think they really have any place in weighing in on this because they are not property owners and I think some of the other residents who do not want protection are quite upset about this,' she said. 'I think planning policies should be dealing with homeowners and not people who might be transient in the community.'

Her comments were picked up by Mayor Tom Mrakas, who pointed out that the people in question are actually voters.

'But we're dealing with planning policy and how neighbourhoods are going to evolve,' she responded. 'I think that is really the purview of people who own the properties as opposed to people who will be here just for a short period of time. That's just my opinion.'

Mayor Mrakas continued to voice his concerns online, posting on Facebook that 'residents were concerned' with the Councillor's comments.

'Suffice to say, I do not agree with the member's position,' he wrote. 'It should be noted that 'renters' can run for and get elected to Municipal Council. In fact, member(s) of Aurora Council have been 'renters.' Clearly, the Municipal Act provides all residents with the same rights to participate in our democracy.

'There is a recognized need for more affordable housing in Aurora' and, in particular, purpose-built rental units. I believe that we need to find ways to provide more housing options so that our seniors can age in place, folks can downsize without having to leave our community and young people have a place to live in the community that they have grown up in. Everyone that lives in our Town is part of our community' whether you own a

house or rent one.?

By the time of last week's Council meeting, Councillor Gaertner admitted that her comments were ?ill-considered.?

?Last week, I clearly misspoke when I suggested that renters should not have the rights to express their opinions on PlaceSpeak,? she said at the start of the meeting. ?I was wrong. Obviously, there are many long-term renters who are active members of our community and make valuable contributions. As a renter myself, I should have realised this.

?In the moment, my words were ill-considered and I truly apologize for any unintended feelings of disrespect that I may have caused. I have always tried to help everyone ? voters or not ? because they are part of our community. Recently, apartment residents on Brookland Avenue and Orchard Heights had some serious concerns and I was pleased that I was able to help them. I am especially proud of the work that I did to try and make basement apartments safer.

?We need to be working together for the benefit of our residents and businesses, not finding ways to divide.?