

George Street Public School will soon meet wrecking ball, Public consultation will take place on housing options

The George Street Public School building will soon be razed, but what will ultimately replace the school on a portion of the land will be up for community and public consultation.

The Town of Aurora purchased the former public school this past April for \$10.72 million, funded from reserves, with the goal of building a neighbourhood park of between four to 10 acres, allowing for multi-use courts, playgrounds and other amenities, with the balance of the site to be sold to recoup some of the purchase price.

The goal of the remainder of the property closest to George Street has been for additional homes and housing forms, but the nature of what will ultimately take shape will be planned in consultation with the community, Council decided last week.

‘‘Currently, we have a school site zoned institutional so we’re seeking direction from Council to initiate the process of going out to the public to consider rezoning that frontage to an appropriate residential zone,’’ said Marco Ramunno, Aurora’s Director of Planning, at last week’s Committee of the Whole meeting.

Ramunno was responding to Ward 5 Councillor John Gallo, who sought assurances that not only would the upcoming redevelopment of the site go through a formal public planning process, but that residents have been kept in the loop to date.

‘‘I have talked to, and I know Councillor Gilliland in her Ward has talked to, quite a few [residents] as well,’’ said Mayor Tom Mrakas. ‘‘The majority of them are aware of what is in front of us tonight.’’

Asked by Councillor Gallo what the feedback has been to date, the Mayor responded they’re ‘‘excited’’ to see a park, but, for the Councillor, the question remained on just how excited existing residents are to see homes built.

‘‘That’s the real question,’’ said Councillor Gallo, asking whether there is a recommendation to have whatever is built consistent with the existing neighbourhood.

That is indeed the present plan, responded Ramunno, noting that minimum 50-foot lots are envisioned, but he noted Council direction can change course on whether the final lots will prove larger or smaller.

Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese, for instance, questioned whether there was an opportunity here to look at zoning that would allow for different housing forms, including purpose-built rentals.

‘‘Certainly, as part of the process moving forward, based on the comments from the public and Council, perhaps it could be [an opportunity] for larger lot sizes or even smaller sizes and different built forms,’’ said Ramunno.

Ward 3 Councillor Wendy Gaertner said she was ‘‘uncomfortable’’ with the recommendation on the floor as ‘‘the public is expecting that we go out to them and present different options?’’ and meeting that expectation would be ‘‘wise.’’

‘‘At the end of the day, we can do what we want, and I think a lot of the public will agree with that, especially if they understand the idea of bringing in some money for that to offset the purchase (of the park) ? but I certainly wouldn’t be in favour of the rezoning this evening, or for the (June 25) Council meeting,’’ she said.

Since the Town announced the purchase of the George Street Public School site earlier this spring, it’s been prepared for demolition.

According to a Council report from Lisa Hausz, the Town’s Manager of Economic Development, the site has been secured and the next steps include demolition, removal of materials and debris, and preparing the site for future servicing.

The building, at present, is expected to be demolished as early as this fall pending Council approval.

The rezoning proposal for the subject lands at 115 George Street aims to optimize land usage for residential and recreational purposes, said Hausz. With approximately 130 metre (426 feet) of frontage along this portion of George Street, the area is suitable to be rezoned from Institutional to R3 Detached Third Density Zoning Category. The R3 zoning has the potential to create seven to eight single-detached residential lots, each with a frontage of 15 metres (50 feet) and a lot area of 460 square metres (4,951 square feet).

This adjustment aligns the Official Plan policy for compatibility with the existing adjacent residential lots. Concurrently, the remaining area, previously designated as Institutional, is proposed to be rezoned to open space, safeguarding it for future community use as a neighborhood park. This proactive measure ensures that no further development encroaches upon this valuable green space, preserving it for the well-being and enjoyment of residents. Importantly, these proposed zoning adjustments operate within the framework of the existing Official Plan, eliminating the necessity for an Official Plan amendment while accommodating evolving community needs.

By Brock Weir