

Green Development Standards will bring environmental focus to new Aurora builds

As temperatures continue to rise, Green Development Standards will help ensure new builds and re-builds in Aurora are looked at through an environmental lens.

Following Council's approval earlier this summer, the Green Development Standards (GDS) came into effect this month, embedding environmental protection into the design and development process in Aurora.

According to the Town, the GDS provides guidelines that will help the Town evaluate development applications through the lens of sustainability and climate change, mitigation, and adaptation. It sets expectations for high-performing buildings, community connectivity, and promotes access to low or zero carbon transportation options through a series of requirements related to energy, ecology, water, complete communities, and building materials waste diversion.

Among the guidelines approved by Council is a requirement for all new residential and commercial builds to meet specific targets for environmental vehicle charging on-site, a set percentage of hard surfaces (such as paved driveways and walkways) be complete with permeable material to promote water absorption back into the soil to prevent flooding, and what the Town describes as bird friendly designs such as visual patterns on windows and exterior glass.

For low-rise residential buildings, at least one parking space must come equipped with an electric vehicle (EV) charging portal, while for multi-unit apartment and townhome developments, at least 50 per cent of residential parking spaces (excluding visitor parking) will be provided with an adjacent outlet or rough in.

New builds will also be required to be designed with an eye at accommodating solar technologies and other renewable energy sources, while some builders will need to conduct feasibility studies for on-site energy generation.

To preserve water, new builds must ensure that post-development groundwater re-charge rates meet the same level as the land pre-development, as defined by the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority. Building applications will also need to confirm that water fixtures be high-efficiency ones, or meet specific flow requirements, depending on the fixture.

Within subdivisions, developers will be required to use native plant species in at least 50 per cent of their landscaped areas, introduce no invasive species, protect healthy, mature trees within the build area, replace any trees that have to be removed to the Town's satisfaction, ensure all exterior light fixtures are Dark Sky compliant to reduce light pollution, and incorporate green roofs, solar PV roofs, and cool roofs to a certain percentage of the builds.

With an eye at creating complete communities, builders must develop a Transportation Demand Management Plan to examine access to public transit and traffic patterns, provide connections or access to a variety of park and open space options in alignment with the Town's Official Plan where possible, provide accessibility options, and more.

As a Town and Council, we have worked hard to take a leadership role in addressing the impacts of climate change, including green development, said Mayor Tom Mrakas in a statement. Making progress in our fight against climate change requires bold action and the Green Development Standards is a critical step towards our goal of reducing Aurora's greenhouse gas emissions by 80 per cent from 2018 levels by 2050.

While the Green Development Standards were supported by Council, members said it was important to ensure the standards are defensible if the municipality receives push-back from the development community.

Whenever we mandate something above and beyond to a developer and it costs them money, we need to have a solid foundation of why we're doing it because they're very protective of their bottom line and those costs would go directly to the homeowner, our new

residents," said Councillor John Gallo. "Unless there is a significant rationale behind doing that, it's a tough call and we have to have that balance because we can't always say, 'Just let the developer pay for it.' It [might] be the homeowner paying for it. If we have proper justification and a real reason why there's a benefit to it, it's okay and I'm okay with that, knowing full well that that will transfer along to that new homeowner but it is a benefit to the community and there's a rationale why we're doing it. That's why we need to have a balanced approach and we can't be too aggressive and we have to do enough to make an impact."

Mayor Mrakas agreed, adding: "It has to be defensible. If they [developers] don't like it, where are they going? They'll appeal it and if it's not defensible we will lose as a municipality. It's a great document and I think it is going to go hand-in-hand with our Official Plan as we update and review it."

By Brock Weir
Editor
Local Journalism Initiative Reporter