

Growth targets are putting strain on additional resources

By Brock Weir

Aurora is set to experience higher-than-expected growth targets, but Regional sewers struggling to keep pace with growth could clog up the works.

A report is expected to come down the pipe later this month on just how Aurora is going to tackle its rapid growth with currently insufficient servicing allocated by the Region of York.

According to numbers that hit the Council table in May, Aurora is on track to hit a population of 68,400 by 2021. By 2026, population targets rise significantly to 76,500. This, the Town says, exceeds what has been anticipated by the Official Plan and reflects a 'stronger than anticipated demand' for residential units.

'A subsequent report is being prepared to outline the Town of Aurora's servicing allocation balances, upon reconciliation of totals with York Region in the coming weeks,' said Michael Logue, Program Manager in Economic Planning for the Town of Aurora. 'However, it appears evident that remaining allocation balances will be insufficient to service even the five year growth forecast potentially up to two years.'

This stark statement raised alarm bells around the Council table, with members assured that answers would be coming 'sometime in June'.

'York Region has been constrained for a number of years as a result of some of the delays and the required infrastructure,' said Marco Ramunno, Aurora's Director of Planning. 'The Upper York sewage system has been delayed, so that will solve the problems once that is constructed, but that is still a number of years off. The servicing allocation isn't a factor with our growth projections. Obviously they are required to achieve those ultimate growth projections, but when I do report back there are a couple of solutions we're working on with the Region to address that in the short term.'

Nevertheless, Council members had their reservations.

'It is always concerning when you read in the report there is not enough to continue our growth because it can become a barrier,' said Councillor Jeff Thom, questioning whether Aurora is in this boat all by itself.

There are, however, other York Region municipalities who are also in the same boat, said Mr. Ramunno.

'A number of municipalities are concerned with the limited amount of capacity,' he said. 'Aurora and Newmarket are in the same boat because we are dependent on the Upper York solution. The Region is well aware of our concerns. Based on our records, we currently have just under 4,000 persons-equivalent servicing capacity and that, quite frankly, is a two or three year supply, depending on if the levels of growth continue on these robust levels.'

'Whenever we bring a report back to Council with respect to approving a residential application, whether it is a site plan or a planned subdivision, we are required to allocate sufficient servicing capacity at that stage. If we do run out and we hope we don't we believe there are solutions available to us. One of the options is we could phase development with respect to the amount of capacity, so we may not have the entire capacity to allocate to a certain development, but we would do that through those reports to Council at the development approval process. We have a couple of solutions we're working on to buy us a bit more time and a couple of years' worth of capacity moving forward.'

While they wait for a report on just what these solutions are, elected officials said they were at least happy to have the numbers before them, particularly in light of wheels now set in motion of bringing forward a new leisure complex to address the many future residents due to call Aurora home within the next decade.

'We're talking about building a number of facilities talking about the future needs of Aurora and positioning ourselves well,' said Councillor Michael Thompson. 'Having these kinds of projections provides some context that we're able to look at the long-term development for [Development Charges] or for facility needs and make some informed decisions going forward.'

Service allocations have already been in place for Aurora's northeast 2C development since 2013. These projections would only pertain to new builds.

'The equivalent of approximately two years is the equivalent of about 3,600 to 3,700 persons worth,' said Mr. Ramunno. 'That is the amount of capacity Council has to allocate out to any new residential developments that come forward. Within that 3,700 persons, Council a number of years ago reserved 1,000 persons equivalent for our downtown intensification. Quite frankly, we haven't really used that much of that. The only one we allocated within that would have been the Treasure Hill development on the northwest corner of Yonge and Wellington. We probably have about 800 persons equivalent left within that intensification reserve.'