

# INSIDE AURORA: No Vacancy

**By Scott Johnston**

Change is coming for Aurora, and I don't think its residents are ready for it.

Anyone who has been over on the east side of Town lately has seen that the open fields north of Wellington and the forests west of Leslie are rapidly being replaced by hundreds of new homes. The sounds of birds in this area have been replaced by the roar of construction vehicles, the whine of power saws and the hammering of nails.

I'm surprised our Newmarket neighbours haven't complained about the noise.

But the change I'm referring to is not the visual loss of these softly rolling green hills, or a pending reduction in revenues that the Town will be able to generate following this construction boom.

Once the development of this area, and maybe a few smaller pockets of space in south Aurora, is completed, we don't really have any more land available to build on.

?No worries,? you say. ?We'll just add 'sorry, no vacancy' wording to the 'Welcome to Aurora' signs on our borders.?

Unfortunately, it doesn't work that way.

The government has mandated growth policies for the province's various regions, and it is expected that as Ontario's population increases, each municipality will house its fair share. According to calculations from York Region, it's currently projected that Aurora will take in about another 25,000 residents over the next 25 years - almost 50 per cent more than currently live here.

That's a lot of extra people in line at your local coffee shop, or piling onto local streets from the GO station at 5 p.m., or in front of you as you jockey for a spot on Yonge Street to watch the Santa Claus Parade.

But it's not the added crush on our service industries, infrastructure and social events that I don't think current residents aren't ready for, it's the implication of where these people will live.

Gone are the days when we could just build more houses on the edge of Town.

So, with all our open expansion space almost fully occupied, our options are limited. Unless we plan something drastic like a midnight annexation of Whitchurch-Stouffville when they're not looking, we literally have nowhere to go but up.

But local height restrictions in Aurora are currently around six stories. It's inevitable that will have to increase.

We've already seen recent complaints from residents about a proposed four story building in a developed area being too tall, blocking light and sightlines, resulting in unsightly waste collection areas, and other issues.

Imagine when they start proposing building eight stories or higher? And these won't be out on the edges of Town. They'll be on Yonge where the transit, infrastructure, and lots of people who enjoy watching an unobstructed sunset are located.

Perhaps more vocal have been the folks who have lived for years next to a vacant lot or a private property like a golf course, and suddenly find that the land owners have determined a more profitable course of action for these sites. Before they know it, area residents find that they'll soon be looking out over not grass and trees, but the fences, decks, and swing sets of a lot of new neighbours.

Till now those have been isolated incidents. But with developable open tracts of land becoming a thing of the past in Aurora, these sorts of headlines will increasingly be the norm as established areas see a push for increased infill, densities and building heights.

It's inevitable, but based on the pushback we're seen so far on the relatively few such development proposals over the past few years, I don't think Aurorans are ready for it.

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