

## Mavrinac neighbours get their park in 7 - 2 vote

**By Brock Weir**

The journey has hardly been a walk in the park, but residents in Aurora's 2B development now have one more to call their own after Council voted 7 ? 2 to secure a six acre parcel of land, which has been the subject of considerable Council debate over the last two years, as parkland.

Following a brief legal battle between the Town of Aurora and Minto Communities over the Town's right of first refusal to purchase the land at 2007 prices at the time the plan for the subdivision, radiating from the northeast corner of Bayview Avenue and Wellington Street East, the Town purchased the property for ?municipal purposes.?

For residents in the area, however, only one municipal purpose would do: parkland.

Whatever the catch-all term ?parkland? entailed was a debate for another day, but residents were united in wanting to keep the land open space, a vision the majority of Council subscribed to last week.

?I am in full support of moving forward with that vision and not letting it fall to development,? said Councillor John Abel, speaking to a recommendation in the Town's new Parks and Recreation Master Plan calling for the land in question to be sold off and the proceeds returned to reserves to secure parkland in apparently underserviced areas of Aurora.

Added Councillor Michael Thompson: ?2B has only 10 acres of parkland [out of a potential 25 acres, or 5 per cent of the neighbourhood] so there is a shortage. Had we started all over and this was the first time we were looking at it, I am pretty sure there would have been more parkland in 2B.

?The minute Council chose to enforce the right of first refusal, we said [the developers] need to honour their agreements but, at the same time, we made arguments we were going to use it for municipal purposes, so we need to honour what we said. The decision for Mavrinac Park was made long ago when Council as a whole said we were going to exercise our right of first refusal and acquire it. Once Council made that choice, [that was the decision]. We're not going to sell it off and flip it. That ship has sailed.?

The ship, however, was still at the dock from the perspective of Mayor Geoff Dawe and Councillor Paul Pirri who provided the two votes against the plan. Speaking against the issue, Mayor Dawe said ?municipal purposes? is a catch-all term.

?There are a number of elements I think would fit municipal purposes and certainly a park is a major component of that,? said Mayor Dawe, noting affordable housing could also be considered a municipal purpose, while also drawing attention to the York Catholic District School Board whose decision not to build a school on the site, as originally planned, led to the Town having to exercise its right of first refusal. ?I have never seen the school board taken to task on that particular issue. We obviously do not have a good working relationship with the Board. If I was a taxpayer in the Separate Board, I would be really ticked. They just walked away from a substantial amount of money.?

This ?substantial amount of money? was a primary reason Councillor Pirri said he had to vote against turning the land into a park rather than selling it to reinvest elsewhere. Aurora, he said, has spent \$2 million to secure the land but, if sold, could realise \$6 million for municipal purposes when one factors in the site could accommodate 128 housing units.

?Overall, when we look at this site, it is very well-serviced as a whole,? he said. ?Maybe not today, maybe not right now, but when you factor in the [180 acre wildlife park] that is going to be put in 150 metres from the site?it doesn't make sense to me. When you look at Smart Growth throughout the whole community, in my opinion, we are not looking at just today, we're looking at five or 10 years in the future. This isn't a decision that looks smart to me five to 10 years down the road. This, in my opinion, is the wrong decision to be making.

?I wouldn't feel right if I didn't do what I thought was right. I will commit to Council that I am not going to ring this over your head for the next three years because I do think there is a time to move on. I do think when we're talking about what to put in the park once a decision has been made to have a park, and I hope I can have some positive contributions to that, but at this point right now I disagree vehemently with a park in this location so, in my view, this is the time I have to voice that.?

From the perspective of Councillor Tom Mrakas, however, Councillor Pirri's view didn't hold water. Posing a hypothetical situation to Al Downey, Aurora's Director of Parks and Recreation, he questioned whether the Town's next step would be to sell off Summit Park, a large chunk of land in an area otherwise well-serviced by parkland.

?We bought this for municipal purposes and that is what we should be using it for,? said Councillor Mrakas. ?If we're going to start talking about whether areas are over-serviced, we need to look around the whole Town and start selling off green space and putting that money [away]. If we're just going to be about dollars and cents like a business, then let's start looking at it in dollars and cents like a business and start selling off properties we don't need because we're over-serviced, let's pocket that money and look to other areas that are not serviced well enough right now.

?To me, that is a foolish idea to look at. This is green space, we should keep it green space. That's what we bought it for. That's what we spent the money for, and that's why we should keep it and that's what the residents want. That's what the vision is for and that is what we're here to do.?