

Mayor vetoes Council decision on transitional and emergency facility

Mayor Tom Mrakas has vetoed a Council decision made February 25 to invite the Region of York to revive its proposal to build a men's transitional and emergency housing facility in Aurora's south end.

Council approved a motion brought forward by Ward 5 Councillor John Gallo at last week's meeting. The motion called on the Region of York to resubmit their zoning bylaw amendment which would have begun the process of reconsidering their proposal for 14452 Yonge Street.

The meeting saw several community members make delegations both in favour and against Councillor Gallo's motion, with local lawmakers ultimately approving it on a vote of 4 ? 3.

Voting in favour of the motion were Councillor Gallo, Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese, Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland, and Ward 3 Councillor Wendy Gaertner. Voting in opposition to the motion were Mayor Mrakas, Ward 4 Councillor Michael Thompson, and Ward 6 Councillor Harold Kim.

The Mayor announced his intention to veto Council's decision the following afternoon.

?After consideration, as head of Council I have vetoed the motion passed at Aurora Town Council on Tuesday, February 25, 2025, that requests the Regional Municipality of York to resubmit the Zoning by-law Amendment application for a Men's Emergency and Transitional Facility located at 14452 Yonge Street,? said Mayor Mrakas in a social media post Wednesday afternoon, which included the formal veto motion.

?As Head of Council, it is my opinion that any alternative use of the property at 14452 Yonge Street, beyond what was identified in the York Region June 13, 2019 report, could compromise its strategic purpose and may interfere with the delivery of infrastructure to support housing,? said the Mayor in the veto motion itself. ?This site is critical for current and future infrastructure needs, including essential municipal services that may be expanded to support housing growth and that may be necessary for future development in southwest Aurora and the Yonge Street corridor, both key growth areas in the Town's updated Official Plan and both which would assist the Town in meeting its provincial housing targets.?

The Auroran understands Council has the option to override the veto by passing a motion within 21 days. A successful attempt to do so would require a 2/3 majority Council vote, or a minimum of five votes. Councillors who voted in favour of Gallo's motion are hoping a meeting to potentially override the veto could take place as early as March 18.

?We're going to give it a shot,? says Councillor Gallo.

Following the veto decision, the group Aurora Cares ? Housing For All, a volunteer group of residents who have advocated for the housing build at the property in question, expressed their disappointment.

?Aurora Cares, Housing for All was proud to see the empathy and compassion our community voiced during the discussion on homelessness at the Council Meeting on Tuesday, February 26,? said the group in a statement.

?We supported Council in their efforts to invite York Region to the table and have a discussion about deeply affordable housing in our community. We are unclear why Mayor Mrakas?who sits on York Regional Council and is a Director for Housing York Inc.?would use the most aggressive tool in his box to block the exact discussions these powers are designed to promote.?

As the dust settled on the veto decision, Councillors who voted in favour of the motion said a discussion needs to be had on the use of Strong Mayor powers.

‘That’s the crux of the issue,’ said Gallo. ‘The resolution put forward and asked by the majority of Council was simply to request the Region to come back and have [the Yonge Street site] as an option. There was no approvals of any sort in the resolution. His use of Strong Mayor powers to stop a discussion is egregious.’

Added Councillor Gilliland: ‘Strong Mayor power simply does not work in small settings such as ours. Big cities, perhaps, but in small Councils and small towns of 50,000+ it just doesn’t work. It is an antidemocratic piece of legislation, it is flawed, it’s too broad, there are way too many grey areas that are up for interpretation. It needs to be sharply defined as something that is more in keeping with specific to advancing housing or they just simply need to rescind this legislation all together.’

An opportunity to have a discussion on Strong Mayor power could be in the offing as a re-elected Progressive Conservative government returns to Queen’s Park. Although the powers were bestowed on communities like Aurora by PC Premier Doug Ford, Weese said ‘maybe there will be a new Minister of Housing, maybe there will be a change in the way the government is looking at Strong Mayor powers after the last two years of it.’

‘We’ll wait and see,’ he said. ‘There is no legitimate reason to use a veto in this instance and is actually contrary to the provincial priorities and purpose of these powers which was to build more housing, not reject it.’

By Brock Weir