

No alternate locations identified for Men's Transitional Shelter

According to a report released ahead of last Tuesday's Council meeting, no new locations have been identified for a Men's Transitional Shelter in Aurora.

The report comes after Council rejected 14452 Yonge Street as a possible location back in February. Instead, it passed a motion to request that Town staff aid Regional staff in their efforts to locate viable properties to build Regionally-funded supplementary housing. The motion required that staff determine three new locations for the shelter to bring back by the end of the year.

The report states, "Town planning staff have collaborated with regional staff to explore potential locations in Aurora. These efforts align with York Region's broader land strategy for emergency and transitional housing. The Region's commitment to a region-wide approach means the number of viable sites in Aurora remains to be determined and may differ from Council's initial resolution."

When asked by Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese at last week's Council meeting whether this meant that no alternative locations had been identified, municipal CAO Doug Nadoronzny confirmed there were not, stating, "There are no sites that the Region has considered to be viable at this point, that's correct."

This inability to locate a viable site means that the project will likely be further delayed as the Region has determined they need a consultant to aid in their review.

"The Region is about to undertake a consultant to perform a comprehensive review of all properties that the Region owns and look at what would be able to be repurposed for alternative housing," explained Mayor Tom Mrakas at the Council meeting.

Ward 6 Councillor Harold Kim asked the CAO whether the Region's CEO had offered any kind of timeline for the review, to which Nadoronzny explained, "I believe in general it's about a year's time after they engage a consultant, but we never spoke specifically about a target date."

This announcement was met with frustration by residents and Councillors alike at the December 10 meeting.

"In January of this year, I was impressed and pleased to learn that Aurora was going to build an emergency and transitional shelter at Yonge and Industrial Parkway. I was hopeful that we were going to do something to help people who have been damaged in life to permanently get back on their feet," said resident Wendy Morihovitis. "In February, I was disappointed and unhappy to learn that the Mayor of my town and three of the Councillors—including my own Ward 4 Councillor—voted it down."

"It's now nearly two years since the first Public Planning meeting and we're coming up to nearly a year since the project was turned down? I'm asking all of you, how many more winters do we have to wait?" asked Len Bulmer.

Both Morihovitis and Bulmer are members of "Aurora Cares - Housing for All", an independent group of about 450 residents looking to combat homelessness in our Town.

The conversation shifted to whether 14452 Yonge Street might be an option worth reconsidering if no other viable locations are identified, despite the report stating, "Regional staff have indicated that the 14452 Yonge Street site is not being considered as part of the region-wide search for emergency and transitional shelter sites."

When asked by Councillor Weese whether the site had been removed from the list of options because it had been rejected last year, CAO Nadoronzny said, "I would expect that you could ask that question of the Region. Indications to me are that that site is no longer on the list of sites that they're considering for this particular use."

The Mayor further explained, "The Region moved forward with the completion of the development in accordance with the 2021

approved site plan agreement? Now that that work is complete, that site will not be part of any review or future look for any type of supportive housing.?

Still, some Councillors remained optimistic, with Ward 5 Councillor John Gallo stating, ?I have no doubt that York Region would reconsider this site if this Council had changed their minds. I can't imagine a reason why they wouldn't if we were to go down that route.?

Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland also advocated for more united, decisive action from Council.

?I really do hope Aurora does come together to do our part, and that we can put our differences aside, and ?not in our backyard' aside, and realize that when we do have a parcel of land that actually is what is good for the community in that sense, we need to step back and do what's right.?

?Are we all disappointed that it's going to take a long time and has to go through a consultant?? asked Mayor Mrakas, ?Absolutely. But, unfortunately, that's the process that they're going to go through. As we are aware, the provision of supportive housing is a Regional responsibility. So hopefully that comes back sooner rather than later and we can move on and have the necessary supportive and alternative housing support within not only Aurora but the entire Region.?

By Selena Loureiro