

# Opposition to Heritage District remains, despite boundary review

**By Brock Weir**

A decision is set to be made this week on whether or not the controversial Heritage Conservation District proposed for Downtown Aurora's southeast quadrant will head to phase two.

Going into this week's discussion, a redrawn proposal will be before Councillors removing homes on either side of Wellington Street East, as well as portions of Victoria Street, from the proposed Heritage Conservation District (HCD) to alleviate some of the more prominent concerns over designation that have come forward from local property owners.

Ratepayers opposed to the plan as a whole, however, insist that redrawn boundaries will not change their overall opposition to the HCD.

Plans have been underway for over a year to turn the area roughly bordered by Wellington Street in the North, Berczy Street to the east, Rotary Park at its most southerly point, and Victoria Street in the west, into Aurora's second HCD.

Several residents have come forward at a series of meetings in recent months to express their support, or lack thereof, for an HCD, including a lengthy Public Planning meeting last month where the majority of over 40 delegates to Council spoke against the plan.

Although some Councillors said they wanted to pull the plug on the proposed HCD right then and there, they ultimately voted to hold off on making a decision on the district's future until this week so concerns brought forward could be addressed by Aurora's planning staff.

Advocates, however, had an early kick at the can last week at Aurora's Heritage Advisory Committee (HAC) where they voted to recommend to Council the removal of Wellington Street from the equation to pave the way for Phase 2.

?When we were talking about the Northeast Old Aurora Heritage Conservation District [on the north side of Wellington Street East] some years ago, we talked about Wellington Street and decided not to include Wellington because we understood it might be somewhat different because a number of those buildings have become used for commercial or office purposes,? said HAC member John McIntyre. ?We didn't want it to prevent the district from going forward, so while it would be nice if there were some support on Wellington Street, if that is a major issue, perhaps [removing it] is a way to help this move forward.?

This was a move supported by Councillor Sandra Humfries, who said she believed it might help further discussion in gauging where the remainder of the proposed district falls in support of the plan.

?From a study perspective, I think having Wellington Street and some of the other areas mentioned, [should be] taken out,? she said. ?I am looking forward to seeing the new suggestions for boundary changes. I think that might help the discussion and see where that lands with the community and see if they are any more in support of it versus where they are today.

?I don't want this causing issues with the neighbours, but some people are really stressed out. Some of the seniors that have contacted me are very upset. They feel like things are happening beyond their control.?

Other solutions explored by the committee, building on some of the comments taken at last month's Public Planning meeting, included an opt-out for property owners, but according to Marco Ramunno, Aurora's Director of Planning, this would create a ?Swiss cheese effect? in the area which would make the HCD difficult to administer.

For HAC member Erina Kelly, Councillors have heard from the people who are for the HCD study heading to phase two, they have heard from people who are against it, but the undecided residents make up a significant portion of residents.

According to Joanne Russo, who represents many of the opposing residents on their Ratepayers' Association, however, the redrawn lines do nothing to quell their opposition as they do not want any heritage designation at all.

?Even if my property would be excluded, it is not fair to other residents who are part of our community that we are fighting for,? said Ms. Russo.

?We don't want it. End of story. There are a lot of people very frustrated about it. If they have to do some renovations, it will cost them a significant amount of grief. In our committee, no one sees it as a positive, but the majority of people are totally against it. Some residents are for it, but they are not part of our committee.?