

Parking still at issue in 2C development

By Brock Weir

It's the last large-scale development left in Aurora, but several subdivisions in the Town's 2C neighbourhoods are expected to take a significant step forward this week with approval of their draft and subdivision plans.

The plans for mixed density housing of over 3,000 units in the northeast corner of Aurora were approved at the committee level last week and while earlier discussions on the plans focused on environmental concerns in the area, the latest debates centred on parking issues.

Two sections within the proposed subdivisions have different standards of parking with some homes being allocated three off-street parking spots (such as driveway and garage space) while others have only two spots to accommodate more homes, with on-street parking slated to pick up the slack.

Some Councillors, however, argued that allocating only two off-road spots in certain areas would be a mistake.

Councillor John Gallo, for instance, said going forward with the plan as is would repeat some of the parking issues just east of the proposed development, such as the areas immediately north of Town Hall.

"I am not interested in putting my name to that," he said. "I am very much interested in having them go back to the drawing board and see what they can do to mitigate that. The whole rationale behind changing our plans to have three spots was because of what we did there and to suggest that we do the same just doesn't make sense to me."

This stance was bolstered by Councillor Chris Ballard, who said the Town needs to prepare for the fallout if the same situation does arise with mass on-street parking impeding traffic and sight lines.

"We have to be prepared in this area to take the calls from angry citizens who are concerned about roads being plowed with cars and that means additional costs when it comes to reinforcement," said Councillor Ballard. "If we are prepared to enforce the rules, then that is fine, but my concern is all too often we just don't have the people power to enforce the bylaws on the roads that we have, let alone the new areas as well."

The majority of Councillors were supportive of the plan and appreciative of the ways the developers had addressed their previous concerns, including reducing the number of units that would only have two spots. Some argued that having them go back to the drawing board to find further solutions to the parking would delay the whole project because the various developers had been working in tandem on significant aspects of the project, particularly roads and other infrastructure.

"One of our challenges is to increase our quantity of affordable housing and we have density challenges we have to meet," said Mayor Geoffrey Dawe, referring to the issue as a "dilemma". "One of the ways you meet those is by reducing the size of the units and the size of the lot. It is a compromise and that is how we have to look at it."

Councillor Michael Thompson added that sending it back for another review would be doing so based on a number of "what if?" scenarios.

"We don't know for a fact everyone is going to have the maximum number of cars and parking on the street and this area is going to be inundated like some are," he said. "I am not willing to hold up the development as a whole. While we're just dealing with one piece, there is the potential this may impact the whole. When it is fully developed, we're talking about 3,000 homes and that is a large chunk of tax dollars for the community. I think it is important for us to move forward on this development."