

Preserving heritage while welcoming growth are public concerns as Council considers downtown's future

Preserving existing heritage while welcoming new growth in Aurora's historic downtown core were among the key issues expressed by residents last week at a Public Planning meeting held to discuss Aurora's proposed Community Planning Permit System.

The system (CPP) was at the heart of Wednesday's public planning meeting.

If approved, it will simplify and speed up planning applications in Aurora's historic downtown core, potentially leading to significant intensification behind the area's heritage facades, and multi-storey developments along Temperance Street.

Should the CPP be ultimately adopted by Council, it would give the municipality further controls on how the area is intensified ? including the look, style and materials used in the new builds, along with how far they are set back from the landmark buildings south of Yonge and Wellington.

Area residents came out to last week's Public Planning meeting to express their views on the proposals, and while they shared the view that revitalization is key to the downtown core's future, the ideal way to go about it depended on perspective.

?As a resident that enjoys everything that is beautiful this Town has to offer, I feel that this proposal for the CPP system is an important one that needs to be carefully followed in order to preserve the heritage and culture of Aurora while allowing the controlled, needed growth and revitalization which is very important to the downtown core,? said Rocco Morsillo, a member of the Old Aurora Ratepayers Association.

?Staff have done an excellent job identifying the key values and the areas in which we can improve on current zoning and nailing down a plan that can be utilized to allow all residents to enjoy the downtown core for many years to come.?

In his delegation, he advocated for options calling for greater setbacks from existing buildings, stating that 10-metre offsets rather than just three, will dovetail better with the neighbourhood, with smaller setbacks leading to ?overcrowding,? the creation of ?eyesores,? and the risk of damaging the structural integrity of the heritage properties.

Resident Sean Dean was next, questioning whether area property-owners had a buy-in to this plan, whereas long-time neighbour Angela Daust, who lives near the Amica and Aurora United Church rebuild at Yonge and Tyler said intensification already ongoing in the area has highlighted issues.

?I have a great interest in the future of Aurora, but I have a lot of concerns about this proposed development,? she said, first addressing the issue of where people might park should intensification be welcomed.

?How many more people can you squeeze into this area? It's to the point where I don't know where you're even going to put the cars on the road,? she said, before asking how infrastructure for such an influx of people in the area would be supported.

Additional concerns included construction challenges due to the area's sandy soils and high water table, impacts to construction on nearby buildings built on rubble foundations, and the massing of large buildings compared to ?little tiny historic homes.?

?What kind of daylight are they going to get? Nothing. They're going to be growing like moss in the middle of a well,? she concluded. ?Progress is good in some way, but the expense of residents should not be from the progress that's going forward.?

Resident David Heard agreed it's a ?tough situation? but said the Downtown Core as it stands is ?struggling.?

?It's not vibrant and I would say, some people aren't going to like this, at times it's not clean. It's not a place I feel like I want to shop

because there aren't destinations. I believe destinations that are successful in business are places that build community. I don't think barbershops and dentists are really community-builders. So, what do we need? We need a vibrant space where people live, they work, and they play. Can we gain that right now in the present Downtown Core?

?I used to live downtown in the 1980s and worked locally. I dream for that day again. Hopefully soon? I want to see the Downtown Core do well, to be vibrant, but I also want to see history preserved, the facades protected. That look is a powerful look. Our downtown core has character, but it has a story ? it has an incredible story of us impacting not just local economy, but global economy. I think we really need to take a look at this. I hear all the points of all the residents, I really do. We need to find balance. Right now, the present system isn't working.

?[People] living there increases safety and pride in your community. Right now, we don't have a lot of that?. We need a walkable community and really attractive community-built businesses in those retail stores. We need residents, without a question, maybe some affordable housing too while we're at it. Maybe that could be a bigger plan. If we're going to do this, we need housing and we need people that can afford housing ? working with the Region, maybe working with the Province, and working with the Federal government.?

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