

Privately-owned public spaces and 'strata parks' raise questions as Council considers future parklands

During recent Council discussions on acquiring land for public parks within Aurora, a newly-approved bylaw raised questions from Ward 3 Councillor Wendy Gaertner.

In the bylaw, the Councillor questioned Council's role in determining how privately owned public spaces (POPS) and 'strata parks,' such as those built on top of a parking garage or other form of utility, would be developed under the criteria set out in the legislation.

Speaking ahead of the passage of a new bylaw 'to require the conveyance of parkland or the payment in lieu of parkland' under the Planning Act, Councillor Gaertner noted the definitions contained in the document.

According to the proposal approved by Council, strata parks 'will be accepted at a pro-rated rate based on percentage of use and ownership to a maximum 50 per cent parkland dedication to credit, subject to legal agreements'.which address matters including but not limited to, maintenance, programming and operations, to the satisfaction of the Town.'

On the subject of POPS, these will be accepted 'at a rate of 100 per cent parkland dedication credit towards parkland dedication' subject to the same legal agreements above.

'[Planning Director Marco] Ramunno explained that's (POPS) just got a different name where we have this now and there will be an area where the public can sit and relax but is really owned by a private owner' [but] the one that really concerns me' is the strata parks,' said Councillor Gaertner. 'The strata parks are publicly-available open spaces, parks, in privately-owned buildings. I have no idea how that would work. Does the public just go up to the roof garden in a private development? I think it is something we need to understand a bit better before we approve it in a bylaw.'

While Town Solicitor Patricia de Sario said further information could come in the form of a memo to Council, Mayor Tom Mrakas said that the way the bylaw is worded would give Council final approval over each application for a strata park.

'If we don't want them, we don't have to approve them,' he said. 'I think the Bylaw is just saying they are allowed and someone could come forward with it as a suggestion, or it could be discussed as an option.'

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter