

Protecting stable neighbourhoods is about the future, not the past: residents

By Brock Weir

It might be a bid to protect Aurora communities that have stood the test of time, but protecting local stable neighbourhoods is about the future as much as it is about the past.

This was a message brought to Council members and municipal staff alike as nearly 200 residents filled Town Hall for a public Open House on Aurora's Stable Neighbourhoods study.

For many neighbours, protecting the look and feel of decades-old Aurora enclaves presents opportunities for all stakeholders, but, in order to fully realise the potential, there has to be a political will to make the change.

"I believe that development is essential within stable neighbourhoods, as it is in any part of Town," said Neil Asselin, a resident of Royal Road. "That said, development within stable neighbourhoods must be carried out in a way that is more sympathetic to what makes these areas stable and desirable in the first place. Changes to the current bylaws must ensure that the stability of the neighbourhood and the wellbeing of all the neighbours that occupy it are favoured over incompatible infill. It builds on our great community, making it better in the long run.

"To start, we must agree that stable neighbourhoods are just that: they're stable, they're not decaying, and they're not in decline. They don't need rebuilding or redefining. They are an integral part of the Town's legacy and their inherent desirability is a vital feature to the areas around the core and to the Town's identity as a whole. Some are trying to change the channel on this and make this about property values, but I disagree. I see that there is value in the neighbourhood that brought me here to purchase a home two years ago and that is worth protecting."

Development, he continued, is both a necessity and an inevitability if neighbourhoods are to remain vital and relevant, but he said he believes new builds should be carried out in the context of what already exists to "further evolve the interrelationship of the built environment and, in doing so, reinforce, reinvigorate and revitalize" the neighbourhood.

"I know it sounds lofty, but it is a basic concept of always having life in our neighbourhood, but always remembering what the neighbourhood means to us," he said, suggesting a steering group to ensure Aurora keeps focus on stable communities.

A similar view was offered by Wells Street resident Carol Fairclough who said she and her family chose to move to Aurora for its character.

"We love the old neighbourhood," she said. "We loved it so much that when we had twins and needed a bigger house, we moved from one century house to another, slightly larger, across the street. There are 11 other families in a three block radius who have done that very same thing because they don't want to leave the neighbourhood."

Speaking to the packed house, she addressed an earlier comment made by resident Peter Curtis, and said she hoped whatever he was building was in keeping with his neighbourhood.

Mr. Curtis said he had lived in Aurora for the past eight years. A former Cardinal Carter student, he moved back with his wife and are currently in the process of demolishing their Holman Crescent home for something new.

"We have exhausted a lot of effort to actually see if we can keep our wartime house," he said. "We had an engineer come in and check it out. Unfortunately, the cost of asbestos, no garage, no insulation - those things add up and play a factor on us. I understand your perspectives. We're in our mid-30s and we're looking forward to 50-plus years in Aurora, just like all of you guys. This seems to be more of an issue of size, two-storey versus one-storey.

"To put it into context, we're putting something together to put to the Town. It is within the bylaws of 35 per cent. Everyone is talking about infill development, but this is not so much infill development for us; it is transitional development. I wanted to put that out there because this perspective hasn't been communicated yet."

Long-time Aurora resident Claude Arcand, however, also took issue with the word "infill," but approached it from another direction. "The use of the word offends me," he said. "It is destruction and replacement. We're not filling in something that wasn't there before."