

Protection of 'Southeast Aurora' neighbourhood could be sparked again next week

By Brock Weir

A proposed heritage district for Downtown Aurora's Southeast Quadrant might have fizzled at the Council table this spring, but if residents thought protection of the neighbourhood was down, it might not necessarily be out.

Councillors are set to revisit protection of the Southeast neighbourhood at Council next week via a notice of motion from Councillor Wendy Gaertner. Councillor Gaertner's motion was floated at the Council table last month and, after giving the required notice, it is due to be discussed around the Council table on July 15.

In her motion, Councillor Gaertner sites the designation and protection of 'stable neighbourhoods' in Aurora's Official Plan, which 'seeks to ensure the stability and vibrancy of these existing neighbourhoods from incompatible development and growth pressure'[ensuring] infill that occurs must fit in and respect the established community character.'

She notes that although the Southeast Aurora Heritage Conservation District was not approved by Council, a further report should come forward for Council to examine 'tools available to Aurora, outside of the Heritage Act, to retain the character of the neighbourhood and to protect it from incompatible development.'

Her motion comes on the heels of discussions in May which looked at alternatives to the Heritage Conservation District (HCD).

At the time, when it was clear the HCD was not going to be passed, many Councillors questioned where things went from there.

While they voted to nip the HCD in the bud right then and there, additional options on the table included rejigging the maps and boundaries to see if it would allay some residents' concerns (it didn't), a focus on strictly residential homes, and a hybrid model while not a formal HCD with designation, but would rather provide a 'Neighbourhood Manual' with guidelines on the 'conservation of cultural heritage resources' tailored to the area, but for reference only.

This option piqued the interest of Councillor Paul Pirri at the time who said it would provide a 'resource' for people looking to spruce up their homes. While he questioned whether this was something the municipality could produce in-house rather than through consultants, it was a good solution moving forward, he said.

'Any time we can give residents an extra resource, I think it makes sense if it is something that can be done in house,' he said.

Although she opposed the HCD, Councillor Gaertner questioned whether there would be a solution to provide residents in favour of an HCD with the protection they wanted rather than imposing heritage designation on those who did not want it.

'This does take a buy-in from the whole community and that is not what we have here,' said Councillor Gaertner. 'There is a desire to preserve the community and the official plan speaks to conserving Cultural Heritage because it enhances the community, and the Official Plan speaks to conserving cultural heritage because it enhances the diversity, beauty, and richness of the natural and built environment.'

With these tools, she said, one might be able to find a middle ground through declaring the proposed study area a 'stable neighbourhood' under Aurora's official plan.

'Only part of this neighbourhood is designated as a stable neighbourhood,' she said. 'Through designation of this whole area as a stable neighbourhood, we could protect it without having to do anything like designating it as a Heritage District. We could use our bylaws to ensure we don't get huge massing in this area.'

Mr. Ramunno pointed out the Official Plan and Zoning are in the tool belt as an HCD would not deal with land issues, but to conserve and enhance the area. Those options, he noted, could be explored further.