

Public consultations begin on Affordable Housing Action Plan

Formal public consultation on Aurora's upcoming Affordable Housing Action Plan began with an open house at Town Hall on September 9.

Led by Marco Ramunno, Aurora's Director of Planning, and Municipal Planner Adam Robb, the session was a chance for the public to review the draft plan and provide input.

The draft plan was presented to Council this past spring and consultation with various stakeholder groups has been ongoing throughout the summer.

Feedback from these preliminary sessions, according to Ramunno, provided valuable feedback ahead of the open house and will help inform the next draft that he expects will be before Council for final approval by the end of this year.

“One piece of feedback that will be part of the next draft wanted us to identify the average median, said Ramunno of figures related to household income. The original draft identified the average median household income and [stakeholders] wanted us to break that down because we have different households; it could be a single-income earner, multiple family household incomes. It's important data to have out there because people were just questioning the varying household sizes out there and that does have an effect on a single person's ability to get into home ownership or the rental market.”

As the evening continued, Robb said the bulk of the feedback had been positive and in support of the plan's objectives.

“One thing we have worked through from the feedback received is the need to continue to build on that context, the initial first segment of the document and building around what some of the income levels are, recognizing the difficulties for young adults, for seniors, and the entire spectrum across the housing continuum,” said Robb, adding the next step in the consultation process was for the draft to be reviewed by the Town's Accessibility Advisory Committee.

“The housing continuum includes right from the furthest left scale of homelessness and emergency shelters all the way to market ownership and everything in between, from supportive housing and transitional housing, rental housing, the spectrum is pretty broad and all-encompassing. That is what it is intended to do. It is providing a multitude of types and tenures of housing across that spectrum. The first draft was focused on the range of economic family, but now we're also looking at through our consultation efforts, one-person households and the rental sides of things as well, to really diversify the context setting for this document is one thing we will definitely be integrating.”

The draft Affordable Housing Action Plan contains a number of action items at different timelines.

One that could come as early as next year is a review of the Town's Zoning Bylaws that could allow for expanded housing models. This, said Robb, is “the tip of the iceberg in terms of what's to come” and will lead to a positive outcome.

In this vein, Ramunno said updating zoning bylaws to eliminate parking requirements would “bring down the cost of land and developing housing” and allowing four housing units per residential lot.

“From there, it is the education of using some of the partnerships with various levels of Government, the Region, other community groups, co-op opportunities, it's having that discussion where I think we can continue to move forward to enter into discussion and partnership with other levels of government, because we do need that funding from various other levels of government to achieve our long-term goal,” said Ramunno.

When asked for “quick wins” among the action items, he said “inclusionary zoning” was key.

?We can look at inclusionary zoning where as part of any development application we can require a developer to provide a certain percentage of those units to meet our affordable targets. We have heard about maybe the Town and the Region can look at deferring or waiving development charges or even planning application fees. There is also the Community Improvement Plan areas as well to provide other incentives like tax deferment and property taxes for some of these housing projects to move forward to lessen the burden on developers, the builders, and hopefully the end users.?

Members of the public, he added, can continue to provide comments by emailing or calling the Town's Planning department and submitting feedback through the Town's online Engage Aurora platform.

?This is the first public meeting and we will see once we organize the comments if there is a need for another open house,? said Ramunno. ?If not, we think we've got the document in a good position to bring it back to Committee and Council for their consideration.?

By Brock Weir