

Public to have further input on development of new Official Plan

As Aurora looks ahead to 2051 through the development of its new Official Plan, finding the right balance between growth targets and preserving the natural environment will be essential moving forward.

This was one of the key drivers presented to Council last week by consultants tasked with guiding the community through the development of the new Official Plan (OP), one which will act as a blueprint for growth for the next 29 years.

The development of the new OP is now in its fourth of five phases.

The latest phase, which is expected to run through to the third quarter of 2022 will include a further public open house to allow residents to weigh in on the plan, as well as a statutory public meeting to give lawmakers and residents alike a chance to see the final draft before it is sent to the Region for approval.

Regional approval is the fifth and final phase of the draft process and is expected to be complete by the end of this year.

?Managing growth?involves ensuring there is a balance between growth and development with the Town, and having it directed to specific areas, and preserving the natural environment,? said consultant Sabrina Colletti in a presentation made to Council at last Tuesday's General Committee meeting. ?Preservation of natural areas is something we heard (from the public) very clearly again. Developing attainable housing is the recognition that there needs to be a greater variety of housing types within the Town and we heard that again very clearly. In order to build communities, prioritizing active transportation and building the infrastructure needed [?and] adapting for sustainability and climate change, we heard very clearly as well ? as well as the need to preserve cultural heritage.

?There was a lot of acknowledgement that throughout phases two and three that there is a greater diversity and the community is becoming more and more diverse, and there is a lot of importance on ensuring there are a variety of voices heard through the decision-making process so it is truly inclusive and that public spaces are designed in a way that is universally accessible to all.?

Aurora's current OP guides development through 2031. The new, broader update will work to include intensification targets handed down by the Province. Meeting these targets will be a balancing act not only from an environmental standpoint but also in ensuring employment lands continue to generate jobs for the community.

Another driver will be the fostering of ?complete communities,? with opportunities to do so identified in Aurora's northeast.

?We have a recommendation to introduce a new Community Hub designation. This would emphasize the co-location of community services and facilities,? said consultant David Riley. ?You might think of the existing institutional site, community centre, where we would have policies to encourage additional uses that would benefit the community. We also discussed climate change and recommendations to address climate change mitigation and adaptation. There is policy direction to encourage the Town to develop clean air initiatives, to use green construction standards when evaluating development and, of course, avoiding flood-prone areas through development and protecting the Town's tree canopy.?

The draft OP takes a second look at the Town's Promenade Secondary Plan, which encourages commerce and walkability along Aurora's Yonge and Wellington corridors, as well as the Provincially-mandated intensification around the GO Station, identified as a Major Transit Station Area (MTSA).

?Knowing there is a 45 per cent intensification target, that means 25 per cent of new units between now and 2051 will be within the built-up area and many of those units will be in areas designated to accommodate growth, which is the Promenade,? said Mr. Riley. ?There is really a need to accommodate growth within the Secondary Plan area and we're going to see that in a combination of ground-related dwellings, stacked townhouses, mid-rise apartments, generally within existing height permissions. The Secondary

Plan doesn't address specifically the MTSA, but it does partially include a lot of the area that is within the MTSA. The boundary of the Secondary Plan needs to be amended to accommodate the entire MTSA. We think there are opportunities for adding additional policies related to built form, setbacks, and permitted uses at grade.?

Added Ms. Colletti: ?Prioritizing the expansion of bus routes and trails within the Town is absolutely a priority, but in order to do that, there needs to be infrastructure to support it, like bike parking. If there's going to be an expansion of trails and bike routes to key destinations, making an investment in improving wayfinding along the trails is something we heard very clearly.?

The final draft of the Official Plan is slated to be presented to Council in June.

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter