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Renoviction support pilot nixed by Council amid uncertainty on need

A potential support pilot program to help protect renters against ?renovictions? ? evictions due to renovations ? has been put on ice by Council amid questions on costs and the ultimate need for new legislation.

The potential pilot followed long-standing work from Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese.

Approximately 12,000 Aurora residents are renters, he said, and while most residents are in rental buildings that are ?relatively new,? some are in a more ?vulnerable? position living in older buildings that might be up for renos.

These older units are often the most affordable, he said, and bringing back a program for Council's consideration no later than the end of 2027, the development of which would be supported by a part-time contract staff member, was important.

?The purpose of the bylaw is to make sure that when an eviction occurs, and the eviction occurs because of an updating, that the tenants are protected,? said Councillor Weese. ?We have to protect the affordable rental properties that we have now. This is simply a way to do it. I'm in favour of this?pilot project with a part-time administrative support that is funded out of the [tax rate stabilization reserve?.] I know that staff is interested in managing employee time, but this is an important thing for those people who are on the cusp of eviction and may become homeless as have, in some cases, been identified through some of the delegations that come to Council.?

Moving in this direction was seconded by Ward 3 Councillor Wendy Gaertner who said the cost of the program would be worth the reward.

?I used to say that this was a Town with a heart, and I would like to prove that,? she said. ?We have a lot of vulnerable renters?. However you look at it, [they] are at the mercy of their landlords and for these renters, some of whom have been renting for many years, this is their home and we need to protect them.

?I think this is a small sum of money compared to the care it hopefully will take of many vulnerable people in Aurora.?

While Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland said while she supported initiatives to help residents, she thought this move was ?putting the cart before the horse.? More information was needed, she said, on both the need for a renoviction program, and the staff resources required to develop the pilot, before proceeding further.

?I believe that some of the Big City Mayors had looked at this? and, from my knowledge? they decided not to do it for various reasons,? she said. ?One of the biggest was that it could actually deter landlords from actually doing any type of improvements to any of their properties and would deter them [from] even wanting to make any sort of investment and could actually encourage landlords to let properties become disheveled or unkempt and just no real investment at all.

?I think there's a delicate balance that can be had here. I don't know what that looks like, but I feel like we're kind of swinging the pendulum from one side to the other in a fairly strong way without understanding what the balance is in the middle yet.?

The Councillor asked Bylaw Manager Alexander Wray for further details on how a pilot would unfold and the ultimate need for one within the community.

He said there have been five to seven N13 notices ? legal documents giving notice to end tenancy ? filed in Aurora over the last five years, or ?1.2 renovictions? on an annual basis.

Ward 4 Councillor Michael Thompson agreed there were a number of questions still outstanding before Council could move forward, including what the program would actually achieve.

?There are some definitive things because of provincial legislation that really restrict our abilities, and I wouldn't want residents to think, ?Great, the municipality now has this pilot program and that's going to help me out,' only to find at the end of the day that, no, this program wasn't geared to be able to do that because Provincial legislation takes precedence,? he said.

But Councillor Weese said while some Council members wanted this information up front, information gathering is part of any pilot project.

?The Province has been wrestling with this for two years now and they've not brought forth anything that would be helpful when people are being evicted for renovation purposes,? said Councillor Weese. ?The issue is they are being evicted and it is eviction because the landlord wishes to improve their property, and they have a right to do that. What we're talking about here in a renoviction bylaw is that a landlord must go through a step that says, and maybe [it] belongs in the Business and Building Code, that when they want to renovate, they have to prove that the renovation is not going to be evicting vulnerable people, and that when they come back they're going to be offered the rent at a reasonable rate? because what happens is that these people are being evicted, they're given maybe three or four months. That's what the Landlord-Tenant Board talks about, or what is right in terms of the landlord offering them some compensation for leaving.

?What this is all about is to be a leader in this so that the 12,000 people that are here, and again, many of them are not vulnerable, but?some of them are. In a couple of cases, these are elderly people who've been living in an apartment for maybe 10 years, 15 years, they have very low rental rates. If they are asked to move, they're out of a home. All I'm asking for is some interest in trying to help people who may be facing this in the future and be a leader, not a follower.

?I think it's a time for us to do that in this community. We have very good landlords in this community, and many of the good ones are not even thinking in this way, but some of them maybe are thinking about changing, and they're not worried, and they're not so worried about the effect on the tenants. And that's our job. I think we're a legislative body here. We should be here trying to make bylaws that help our rental stock, our affordable rental stock, and the people who live in them.?

The amendment to implement the renoviction support pilot program was voted down 4 ? 2 with Councillors Weese and Gaertner voting in favour, and Mayor Mrakas absent from the meeting. The staff report was received unanimously for information.

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter