

## Renovictions could be tackled by Council this month

Aurora needs to step up and support its renters when it comes to renovictions, Council members agree, but just how to do so is the question now being considered.

Renovictions were the subject of discussion at last week's Committee of the Whole meeting where Council reviewed a report looking into the financial implications of formalizing Aurora's response to such cases through a bylaw.

Renovictions, when tenants are evicted from their rental units ostensibly to make way for renovations, has been the topic of significant Council discussion this year following a motion from Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese last fall tasking staff with looking into what the Town can do to support residents in this situation.

The report, which is set to be discussed further at the June 23 Council meeting, looked at a number of different models to address renovictions, along with the financial implications of each.

Should Council wish to proceed with the implementation of a municipally-administered renovictions licensing and enforcement framework, additional staffing resources would be required to set up the program, and then support complaint intake, investigations, inspections, licensing administration, and enforcement activities, said Alexander Wray of Aurora's Bylaw Services Department. Experience from larger Ontario municipalities indicate that the implementation of a renovictions bylaw can result in significant increases in resident requests for inspections, investigation, and municipal involvement.

Municipalities that have implemented these programs have attributed increased service demands to heightened public awareness, misunderstood expectations respecting municipal jurisdiction, and the escalation of landlord-tenant disputes requiring municipal review or response.

If Council decides to address renovictions through the development of an enforcement-based program, Wray said the Town would need to hire a full-time contract staff member and one part-time contractor to support the program within the Bylaw department.

These additional staffing resources would assist in addressing [the] anticipated increase in complaint volumes, investigative and inspection requests, administrative coordination, and resident inquiries associated with the renoviction program, said Wray.

As an alternative to implementing a municipally-administered renovictions licensing and enforcement framework, staff reviewed the feasibility of a one-year pilot program focused on resident support. The intent of the pilot program would be to better understand the frequency and nature of renoviction-related concerns within Aurora, identify resident support needs, evaluate service demands, and collect operational data to assist in determining the long-term feasibility and effectiveness of this type of municipal support program.

As an approach scaled to Aurora's operational environment and historical volume of N-13 Notices, staff recommend the recruitment of one part-time contract position within the Town's Bylaw Services Division for a one-year term at approximately 24-hours per week. The proposed position would primarily serve as a liaison between residents who have received N-13 Notices and existing provincial processes and community support resources.

Council left last week's Committee of the Whole meeting without coming to a consensus on the best option. While members agreed that it's an urgent situation that needs to be addressed, they hope for more information to come forward ahead of this month's Council meeting to address two key issues: how to move forward without having to bring on new staff people now, and how to lay the groundwork for the next Council ahead of any implementation.

Supporting a fulsome response, rather than just a pilot program, was Councillor Weese who said the proposed pilot, on paper, may help the evicted tenants with their rights, but it does little else.

'I see value in that, but I don't think it goes far enough to protect the tenants by not creating increased scrutiny of renovation-based evictions, proof of vacancy, or enforcement provisions that would prevent rent evictions,' he said. 'When you look at the 19 per cent of our population, or somewhere close to 18,000 people who live in rental units, then there's a significant number of our rental people that are under this veil, I suppose, of concern that a landlord could suddenly say, 'I want to increase the value of my property,' renovate, evict people, and those people are out of their homes, and I don't think that's fair.'

'What I'm asking here is that we don't do the pilot, but we do hire a full-time contracted person for bylaw enforcement or licensing officer and a part-time contract administrative support position to administer and support the pilot program, and that we bring back the bylaw in September, or whenever it can be done in the next term. I will tell you that I'm really concerned about the urgency of this, because we do have tenants in this community right now who are facing these kinds of evictions, and I want to protect them going forward in the future.'

Council members didn't necessarily disagree with Councillor Weese's assessment, but concerns were raised when Town Solicitor Patricia De Sario pointed out that the required positions would need to be brought on before the end of this term of Council should lawmakers go forward with a full program as the staffer would be tasked with drafting the relevant bylaw.

'Our historical N-13 volume is low and that's actually good news, but it doesn't mean that we look the other way,' said Ward 6 Councillor Harold Kim. 'The question isn't whether we act, it's whether we act in proportion to what's actually happening here versus what's happening in the large municipalities with very different rental market dynamics. In the end, I think we all have the same objectives to help these residents.'

He added he would ordinarily support moving ahead with a full program rather than a pilot, but pilots help them gain information, and then we make a more targeted decision after the pilot project.'

The only issue Councillor Weese said he had with going forward with just the pilot was that sense of urgency.

But whether Aurora will be able to forge ahead with an option without bringing on new staff is the question Council hopes to have answers to before the end of this month.

'I'm not in support of hiring anyone now,' said Ward 5 Councillor John Gallo. 'We're at the end of our term and I can appreciate the urgency, but, to me, this is an issue that the next Council has to address.'

Added Councillor Weese: 'I agree with Councillor Gallo on this issue here. What I'd like to have some urgency on is the development of the bylaw so it can be brought back for Council's consideration and implementation. If what you're saying is the part-time person is sufficient to do that, then I'm agreeing with both Councillor Kim and Councillor Gallo that if this can be done in a relatively urgent fashion, be brought back to us in September so that we can take a look at the bylaw and anticipate what the costs are. I just want to see some urgency on this on behalf of our residents.'

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