

Restrictions on developments in stable neighbourhoods eyed by Council

By Brock Weir

The new year could bring a temporary crackdown on new building projects in Aurora's stable neighbourhoods. Council last week tasked staff with coming up with a proposal for an Interim Control Bylaw intended to restrict developments in established communities with older housing for up to a year.

The possible Interim Control Bylaw was first floated through a Notice of Motion from Councillor Tom Mrakas. In his motion, he said Aurora has experienced "a significant amount of pressure for infill residential development that has resulted in intensification through the construction of additions, conversion of existing floor area and the demolition of existing buildings for the construction of larger, more intense forms of development" and staff are already reviewing existing zoning policies.

In addition to this review, he and his fellow Council members said such a motion was timely in light of Provincial legislation passed last week which signalled the end of the Ontario Municipal Board in favour of local appeals tribunals.

"This Council approved a study in regards to stable neighbourhoods and looking at the zoning within those stable neighbourhoods so we could have a staff report come back to us looking at how possibly we can deal with the concerns in regards to those stable neighbourhoods with monster homes or homes that don't fit within the neighbourhood or development that doesn't fit within those stable neighbourhoods," said Councillor Mrakas.

"Normally a lot of municipalities, when doing one of these studies, have implemented an interim control bylaw, which is a very complex piece of legislation that allows a municipality to be as strong as they would like to be or not as restricted and just have certain aspects within the bylaw they create to stop certain aspects of development within the areas they are studying."

A proposed bylaw, he said, could identify specific areas where an interim control bylaw might take effect, but it is not intended to prohibit any variance applications to come forward from area residents.

"If there are residents or homeowners that come forward and they do need a small variance to make an addition to their home, they could come before Council and ask for an exemption and we could allow an exemption." "I think the majority of us, if it is a resident that is looking to make some addition or alteration to their home that would allow them to maybe make more room, we would allow for that exemption because we understand it is a resident looking to stay, it would still fit in with the confines of what that stable neighbourhood has.

"I think what the interim control bylaw would stop and pause while we did the study, the builder and developer that is coming in, knocking down the home and looking to create something that doesn't fit within that stable neighbourhood."

Added Councillor Michael Thompson: "[The tribunal regulations] are all starting to come out and how that mechanism works, along with some of these, I think is good information for us to make some determinations going forward."

Councillor Mrakas' motion was approved 7 ? 1, with Mayor Geoff Dawe being the odd one out citing concerns about whether an interim control bylaw would adversely impact the property values of residents looking to sell up.

It was also approved along with an amendment from Councillor John Abel that any proposed Interim Control Bylaw exclude the redevelopment of Highland Gate.

This amendment was put on the table after representatives from Geranium Homes, the builders of the development, approached the podium last month asking for reassurances this would not hinder their redevelopment in any way.

"The only reason we want to do this is to put everyone's mind at ease," said Councillor Abel. "By not doing so, they have these concerns and I would sympathize with that position. They have only asked for some clarity in wording so they can feel at ease."

While Councillors Mrakas and Abel debated the semantics of the amendment, it ultimately passed.

"Are we trying to solve a problem that doesn't exist?" asked Mayor Dawe. "We've done that before. I would be happy to see a report, but I have problems fully appreciating the ramifications of this. I have no knowledge whether this would negatively or positively affect property values."