

Stable Neighbourhoods proponents see opportunity in OP review

Proponents of more stringent protections of Aurora's so-called 'stable neighbourhoods' are seeking further restrictions on new builds as the Town prepares for the next phase in its Official Plan review.

Council met at a Public Planning meeting last Tuesday to examine initial findings of the Town's ongoing Official Plan review, which will result in a blueprint in 2022 that will help guide growth and development in Aurora through 2051.

Delegates to the meeting called for further consideration on the future of Aurora's Stable Neighbourhoods 'Regency Acres, Aurora Heights, Temperance Street and the streets in the vicinity of Town Park' just a couple of weeks after Council approved urban design guidelines impacted residents argued missed the mark.

'The Official Plan review presents an opportunity to address concerns of residents now and in the future,' said Peter Smith, President of the Regency Acres Ratepayers Association. 'In Regency Acres and other stable neighbourhoods, several issues arise we feel should be included in the revised plans and/or bylaws. The first issue deals with building new homes in areas with high water tables. For example, in Regency Acres groundwater is found close to the surface. It is our understanding that approved new builds do not take this into account and height restrictions are circumvented by simply raising the grade to comply. (IE: The ground to the midpoint roof measurement)

'This means that new houses are much higher when compared to the neighbouring dwellings. To correct this problem, extensive hydraulic studies to determine if this is indeed a factor must be carried out before construction begins. If pre-existing water problems are found, the building plans should be altered to reflect those conditions. Building heights must not be allowed to exceed the maximum heights allowed. Changes to the Official Plan (OP) and zoning bylaws must make that abundantly clear with steep fines for non-compliance.'

A second issue identified by Mr. Smith was the protection of mature trees in older neighbourhoods. There is an opportunity here, he said, to 'consider the importance of mature trees' to the continued health and wellbeing of the local environment.

'In addition to their natural beauty, mature trees provide invaluable benefits such as shade, privacy, soil and water retention, reservoir for carbon dioxide, etc.,' he said. 'Humans are not the only creatures to benefit. The older trees provide shelter, homes, protection and food for many species of birds and wildlife, which are valued in our communities. Therefore, we ask that the revised OP support stronger measures to ensure that mature trees are protected from unnecessary removal. This could be handled by tougher tree bylaws and enforcement. Planting replacement trees, which take many years to mature, while a good idea, does not solve the short-term problem or the long-term problem.'

Mr. Smith also objected to the use of the word 'compatible' in the process, a term which he deemed 'vague and seemingly meaningless' in the context of Stable Neighbourhoods.

'New zoning bylaws permitted the continued construction under the guise that 4,000 square foot houses were compatible with a 1,000 square foot residence,' he contended. 'Stable neighbourhoods were lumped together in the blanket approach that one size fits all was applied. This was pretty common knowledge that Regency Acres was screwed by this process. For this reason, we would like to propose that the new revised OP move towards a differential approach for Stable Neighbourhoods. Each area has unique characteristics which should be treated separately. The urban design guidelines reports clearly demonstrate this approach was possible. We trust that future zoning bylaws follow suit and changes can be reflected in the revised OP.'

These concerns were reiterated by Rebecca Beaton, who has previously delegated to Council on behalf of the Ratepayers' Association.

'As it stands right now, every neighbourhood and every subdivision has the same characteristics under the Stable Neighbourhoods

policy and obviously that is not correct,? said Ms. Beaton. ?Homes built when Aurora was Machell's Corners over two centuries ago are the same according to the policy that we have and homes that were built a century later are obviously quite different. These homes are all different, they are all different centuries, they have different characteristics and they shouldn't all be lumped together.

?This review can and should address and reconcile these differences. I would ask Council to take this opportunity with the OP review and look at the three Stable Neighbourhoods and make the necessary amendments that appreciate their separate and distinguished history.?

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter