

Stable Neighbourhoods report due in New Year, but ratepayers want more input

By Brock Weir

A consultant's report on how Aurora can best address development within long-established communities is due next month, but impacted ratepayers say they are concerned about the level of input they've had in upcoming recommendations.

The concerns were brought to Council's attention last week by Peter Smith, President of the Regency Acres Ratepayers' Association (RARA).

The report commissioned near the end of the last Council term was intended to bring a back a series of recommendations on how to handle infill developments with so-called stable neighbourhoods, evaluated and compiled by a consultant (The Planning Partnership), arms-length from the passions displayed by residents and Council members alike on both sides of the issue.

The Planning Partnership's recommendations are due to be made public near the end of next month ahead of the January 30 Public Planning meeting where residents will be able to weigh in on the report.

But Mr. Smith said he and his fellow residents have not been 'allowed' to meet directly with the consultants to express their issues. 'It is our understanding that Town Planning staff is to provide zoning bylaw and other official data to the consultants, plus copies of delegations from Council meetings, as well as discussions with ratepayers' associations of the affected areas,' said Mr. Smith in his delegation to last week's General Committee meeting. 'To date, only the Town Park and Aurora Heights associations have met with Planning staff. On behalf of RARA, I responded to Planning staff's emails about a meeting. Unfortunately, we are still waiting for a response about setting a date.'

This delay, he said, was 'unacceptable' because an April meeting with Planning staff 'provided some general recommendations on redevelopment that was occurring in our area.'

'Since then, our Association has done extensive research about the bylaws and design guidelines in other Ontario communities,' said Mr. Smith. 'We have also witnessed further demolition and construction. In light of this research, our knowledge and understanding of redevelopment and design issues in mature neighbourhoods has increased considerably.'

As such, Mr. Smith said his group had developed additional recommendations to address the concerns of RARA. Among these suggestions is a provision that height of new buildings must be measured to the peak of the roof and should not be limited to nine metres for a two-storey building. Moreover, lot coverage should vary based on the type of structure, with lower coverage for two storey homes to help preserve privacy, sunlight and air flow for adjacent homes.

'The most distressing part of this whole process is that none of the ratepayers' groups have been allowed to meet directly with the consultants,' said Mr. Smith. 'We also have not been asked to provide copies of our delegations to Council. This is important because it is thought that most of these presentations were not forwarded to the consultants. For this reason, we will supply the consultants with letters to the editor, comments to staff, and copies of our Council presentations. We expect to see these views reflected in the consultants' report.'

'This brings up a serious question: Just what documentation has been provided to the consultants to represent the needs and concerns of our three stable neighbourhoods? We have recently asked for a copy of the complete information package the consultants received. The draft consultants report is due and, as ratepayers' associations, we have no idea what it will be based on. Thus, the Regency Acres, Town Park and Aurora Heights associations request that we be allowed to review and comment on the draft report before it is presented to Council in January.'

No firm assurances were made publicly at Council table, but Councillor Wendy Gaertner sought and received confirmation from outgoing Planning Director Marco Ramunno that all of the delegations received by concerned residents through the Public Planning process so far had been sent to the consultants ahead of drafting their report.

'They are reviewing all the various reports that have been done, they have all the information in front of them, and they are scheduled to [deliver] a report back to Council at the January 30 public planning meeting,' said Mr. Ramunno. 'I haven't seen the report yet, but it will be ready and made public, as per our procedural bylaw, a week before the meeting.'

'It is a public planning meeting, so the report will be made available when it is prepared in advance of the meeting. It will be a formal public planning meeting, they will have an advance opportunity to see the report and to make their comments in advance or at that meeting, because it will be one of our standard public planning meetings. They will have plenty of opportunity to make the comments. If they have additional comments in advance they want to provide to the consultant they can do so and we will ensure they get forwarded onto the consultant.'