

Supporters of shelter veto say Mayor's voice is theirs

Council chambers will filled last week as lawmakers considered a motion brought forward by Councillors Ron Weese, Rachel Gilliland, Wendy Gaertner and John Gallo to overturn a veto levied by Mayor Tom Mrakas on a Council decision which would have invited the Region of York to re-apply for a men's transitional and emergency housing development in Aurora's south end.

Strong support in maintaining the veto came from dozens of residents, many of whom donned red and white for the occasion, and some wielding election-style signs bearing the motto "Our Mayor, Our Voice" to make their position clear.

First to speak was Ward 5 resident Ken Chen who said the ongoing controversy regarding the Region's proposal has put "Aurora under siege."

"The shelter proposal at Yonge Street is not just a bad position, but it is a full-blown attack on our community. Let's be clear: this proposal we're talking about today is attempting to ask York Region to resubmit a zoning application, for an application that doesn't comply with Aurora's planning and has been rejected by York Region during necessary democratic process," he said. "Despite this veto and clear rejection, certain Councillors continue to push for this flawed project, trying to overturn the veto."

The continued debate on the matter, particularly to overturn the veto, he said, "is a war on the people, a betrayal of our trust."

A similar perspective was offered by Ki Kit Li, who said he represented 3,000 community members as a lead with Aurora United, a group whose name was emblazoned on the signs.

He said the "Our Mayor is our voice for many reasons" including the veto, which was "upholding the due process and democratic integrity and transparency."

A key issue, he said, was the proposed site on the west side of Yonge Street, just south of Industrial Parkway, is zoned for low density and the "Mayor did the right thing to uphold" the Official Plan.

"The Council was heading in the wrong direction," he said.

Harbinder Thandi, who had previously spoken at the podium against the Region's proposal, said the Mayor's veto was upholding the democratic process.

"Democracy is a government by people, a government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation. That is what Aurorans have come to expect here today - that is what the Mayor has been trying to give the residents of Aurora. By using the Strong Mayor powers, this isn't something that we should be proud of; we should actually be sad that he had to use these powers"

"Strong Mayor powers can be used for transit, roads, utilities and servicing in relation to construction and maintaining infrastructure to support housing, including transit, roads, utilities and servicing. These are all of the reasons why our mayor has reiterated, whether it be in person or whether it be through Facebook, whether it be through other means of trying to speak to us Aurorans and let us know what is the reason he had to use the Strong Mayor powers - not to mention that he is the only member here that serves on the York Housing Board?. Let's do something right and actually find a proper, suitable location instead of re-hashing and wasting everybody's time."

The democratic process is what brought resident Joe Vesia to the podium as well, stating the motion to overturn the veto was "causing division" in the community.

"Sometimes in Q2 of 2025, York Region will be presenting Regional Council with the results of a region-wide selection. Let them

do their job. Last fall, the proposed location was paid and York Region planted over 300 trees and shrubs. My question to you is, why are we here? Why are these four Councillors asking York Region to spend millions on building a new shelter in Aurora when York Region owns buildings that can and should be repurposed?? he asked.

?Instead of causing division in the community, you should instead invest your time and energy on making Aurora a better place to live for your taxpaying residents.?

Community division was also cited by resident Frank Ni, who has ?social media has turned into a battlefield? and if ?we dare say no? there are accusations of violating human rights.

?Since when did saying no become wrong?? he said. ?It means we care about our Town, our families and our future. It means we want a solution that works for everyone because every single resident matters. I truly understand why some of you support this idea. Homelessness is the root problem and it is harder to see people struggling in the street. They deserve our help, our compassion, and our action but?. Good intentions are not enough. How many times have we seen good intentions backfire finally?

?It's about us saying yes to a better solution, which is why I stand with the Mayor's veto. Let's not just do what is easy, let's do what's better. Let's build a united Aurora where every voice and valued, not just because we have to but because we must do the right thing and do it right.?

A similar viewpoint was voiced by Shaheen Moledina who said she was at the podium to ask Council ?to stop dividing us? and allow the veto to stand.

?I feel that Council is creating division among the Town of Aurora instead of uniting us with this special meeting. This motion also fosters unrealistic expectations for Aurora regarding the situation and misleads the community.?

She cited the Mayor using his Strong Mayor powers to ?veto this situation because it has gone beyond what we expect as taxpayers.?

By Brock Weir