

Urban design guidelines concerning for some Council members

By

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Urban design guidelines, which could give planners a blueprint on the kinds of building materials and aesthetics that would be welcome in Aurora's stable neighbourhoods could be too restrictive, according to some Council members.

While much of the recent Stable Neighbourhood debate around the Council table centred on striking the right balance when it comes to the size of potential new builds in Aurora's established communities, some of the talks have focused on a set of Urban Design Guidelines that are due to be presented to Council at a later date.

?Urban Design Guidelines are a place-making tool consisting of a set of written guidelines, illustrated plans, diagrams and images of buildings and places,? said Andria Sallese of the Town's Planning and Development Services Department in the report before Council. ?The Stable Neighbourhood Urban Design Guidelines will be used as a tool to help ensure new development is compatible with, and respects and reinforces, the study area's existing stable neighbourhoods. The Guidelines will also promote the contextual response that supports architectural and streetscape continuity, while allowing for and encouraging flexibility and diversity.

Urban Design Guidelines were floated by Council as a means of steering the look and feel of new builds slated to go into stable neighbourhoods, but Councillor Michael Thompson said new policies could run the risk of being too restrictive.

Beginning the discussion at the Committee level, Councillor Thompson said he hasn't heard a lot of concerns from residents when it comes to building materials. Instead, much of the feedback has been around building size, massing and footprint.

?I do share some of the concerns and when I read through the proposed urban design guidelines, I am concerned they will be used ultimately as a means to restrict people's ability to build the home they want,? said Councillor Thompson. ?There will be choices they will not be allowed to pursue because of that determination will be made as to whether or not those are acceptable materials. I am concerned that once you put that into print it becomes an issue.

?Up to this point, I think the Department has managed to do a fairly good job at approving plans and bringing forth for Council's approval, or through their own department, of managing that process and engaging the builders themselves and making suggestions to improve compatibility. To me, I am not sure we need the Urban Design Guidelines. I

think it might create more issues for us than it resolves.?

Councillor Thompson added he understood that the Guidelines were already being used on planning decisions despite them not being approved or finalized by Council. They are already guiding the decision-making process, he argued.

?At the end of the day, I don't want to stifle design; I want to encourage it.?

Councillor Wendy Gaertner, on the other hand, said she believed that Urban Design Guidelines were needed, and what was also needed were these Guidelines coming back to Council for future discussion.

But Mayor Tom Mrakas supported Councillor Thompson's viewpoint, with caution, saying he didn't want to be ?restrictive? because these Guidelines could ultimately end up policy.

?We don't know what is going to be in front of us once staff bring it to us,? he said. ?Let's see what [they] bring to us and make a decision at that point. I would at least like to see us have that opportunity to see what staff are going to present us in those guidelines before we outright say no to them.?

These sentiments continued into last week's Council meeting with members largely agreeing to wait to see what the guidelines are before making a decision, including Councillor Thompson who said following discussions with Town Planner David Waters he wanted to ?reserve judgement? until the final report.