

## Wellington Street rental development could be appealed after Council indecision

The future of an infill development of stacked townhouses adjacent to two existing apartment buildings on Wellington Street West could be decided by Ontario's Local Planning Appeals Tribunal after Council reached a deadlock last week.

In early March, Starlight Investments came forward to Council requesting amendments to Aurora's zoning bylaws to pave the way for 60 new rental units at 145 and 147 Wellington Street, pitching their development as a step in the right direction for affordable housing in the community.

The development cleared the first hurdle at the Council's last General Committee meeting before the COVID-19 pandemic, but was subsequently put on ice after Council resumed remote meetings in April. The delay at that point came after nearby residents questioned how the infill development would impact parking for existing residents.

This was once again the case when local lawmakers met last Tuesday and these lingering questions left Council unable to reach a majority consensus on whether to approve or deny the application.

One such resident, Mitch McGuire, expressed his views in a virtual delegation to Council. Here, Mr. McGuire said the proposed parking spot to unit ratio was far short of what it needs to be.

"There is no way there is enough parking," said Mr. McGuire, citing the 265 spots proposed by Starlight. "In December of 2018, [the property owners] instituted paid parking for visitors, so all the visitors had to pay for parking at a rate of \$1.50 per half hour or less to a daily maximum of six. They did eventually pull out the parking meters at the beginning of the year and put in new rules in February. We're only allowed the same visitor ten times and anything over 10 times will be rejected, so they won't be allowed to park and could be tagged and towed. That is just not right."

The resident's comments struck a chord with a number of Councillors, including Councillors John Gallo and Wendy Gartner, who counted the parking situation as one of the several reasons they could not support the application.

For Councillor Gallo, a sticking point was the number of new units proposed by the developers, which, he said, had gone up by three units since Council last took a pass at it.

Councillor Gaertner also looked at the matter from the perspective of affordable housing, stating that while current rental rates offered on site would be considered affordable, rents increase as the property owners refurbish existing units.

'We have decided, all of us, that 1.5 was the correct standard to provide residents a quality of living or what they needed,' said Councillor Gaertner of the parking spot formula. 'It went down to 1.3 because this developer added subsidized rental units. They agreed to do it for 20 years, so they got the 1.3 standard. We've never reduced our parking standard below the 1.5, so I do not understand how it is possible that we will allow this developer to provide this decreased number of spaces. On top of that, we have so few affordable units in Aurora. We have two other apartment buildings. These affordable units will not be affordable when the new tenants move in, so we will be losing, at the end of the day, 204 affordable units.'

Looking at the application, Councillor Rachel Gilliland said the 1.5 standard is 'great' but studies provided by Council have shown what the applicants proposed was adequate and approving it would be 'following the experts.'

'If some of the residents were losing their parking spots, perhaps I would feel a different tune, but in this particular instance, I feel if everybody is given their spots and the units that are going to be developed also have one, I feel like there is a bit of win-win,' she said. 'I understand they are doing a lot of renovations and they are cleaning up the place and making it look really great, so I think this is a great advantage to the community but I don't really want to sway in that direction too much because, at the end of the day, it becomes about the parking. Going forward [with the information I have today] I am okay with what is being presented by the developer, but in the sense that they are over compliant, in which the professional experts have brought to us today and the original residents aren't losing anything.'

Of a similar viewpoint was Councillor Harold Kim who said his 'default' was always in favour of more parking, but the developers did address many of the other concerns previously addressed by Council, including preserving existing on-site amenities.

'We have already identified that existing tenants are not going to be losing any of the parking spots, that stays the same. There is full disclosure, as was already mentioned with the new tenants and the future townhouse development that they are only going to have one, Mr. McGuire had concerns over the future tenants, but the future tenants know what they are getting into, [but] I don't think that should be a concern.'

'The merits of the plan, I think, are fine. I'm ready to go ahead with the staff recommendation.'

But Councillor Gallo strongly disagreed with these assessments and said he was 'shocked' at what he was hearing around the table.

'Our standards in many of your minds, from what I've heard, are trumped by a consultant that is paid for by a developer and nobody

seems to have a problem with that. Nobody seems to have a problem with a multitude of residents bringing forward concerns that report was not accurate. It wouldn't have taken much for our own staff to go there and verify themselves,? he said. ?At the Public Planning meeting, we told [residents] that we're going to make sure the developer goes back and revisits this. We promised that. They have come back and added three units and only one parking spot. How can we tell those residents that we're doing a good job? I just don't understand it. It is not too late to change your minds. If you're convinced of this, you're convinced of this.?

Mayor Tom Mrakas nevertheless reiterated his previously expressed view that Council should sign off on the application.

?By us denying this at this time and going to LPAT (Local Planning Appeals Tribunal), where we know that they're going to approve it and we'll lose the concessions that have been given to the Town and spending money at a time when we really shouldn't be spending money when we know we're just going to throw it out, we might as well write a cheque to LPAT right now and give it to them. We can do a lot more with that money in this difficult time than to just give it away to LPAT. That's a disservice to the residents of this community.

?We know exactly what is going to happen at LPAT and anyone who tries to tell anyone otherwise, that, ?no, we're going to win at LPAT,' if you want to throw away \$75,000 - \$150,000 for a hearing, by all means go ahead, but that's a disservice to the residents.?

After several motions failed to gain a majority Council vote, Council ultimately voted to simply receive the report.

**By Brock Weir**