

2C Development plans get go-ahead from Council

By Brock Weir

Plans for Aurora's 2C subdivisions, the Town's last large-scale development areas, were approved at Council last week.

Council's approval came amid renewed concerns over affordable housing and housing variety in the neighbourhood, as well as parking standards, concerns which have spilled over from previous talks.

The plans contain several kilometres of off-road and on-road trails and neighbourhoods with mixed housing types and densities. Over the road it has taken to get to this point, people have sounded the alarm on a wide variety of issues, including what some environmentalists believe to be an insufficient buffer between development and wildlife areas. In addition, there have been worries over the fact some trails are not off-road, and the fact some pockets within the neighbourhood have provided for only two off-road parking spaces, with some arguing that it should be three to alleviate traffic congestion.

'Changing these standards will benefit the developer, but I don't think it will benefit the future community that is going to be residing here,' said Councillor Wendy Gaertner. 'I think it is going to be a less liveable area if we change these standards. I believe we have concrete examples of what this area could look like if we change the standards, and that is the area just north of Town Hall.'

'Here, the streets are congested with vehicles. It is very, very hard to find a place to park. It is very frustrating and some people might say it is unsafe. I think this is an unacceptable reality to impose upon a new community when people aren't even living there to be able to voice any objections.'

These sentiments were shared by Councillor Chris Ballard, who said he had concerns over how intensification had played out in one particular block of housing. Intensification is fine, he said, but the resultant parking issues are another story.

'When we put an awful lot of people together when we have a high density, if we don't provide them with adequate access to green space and to active transportation and ease of access across St. John's Sideroad, we're asking for trouble,' said Councillor Ballard. 'I do hope that in 20 years I look back and say there is a mistake I made, I was wrong to worry about that, but I am worried about it and I have thought long and hard about it.'

For other Councillors, however, the wide variety of homes that will eventually be on sale to the consumer in this area was something to celebrate. Speaking to the recommendations, Councillor John Abel cited the fact that 40 per cent of this development will be open space, with a further 16 kilometres dedicated to trails - the majority of which will off-road - and said it would be one of the best developments in Town.

'There is absolutely no reason to tell people you're going to create a problem when there is none to be there. People need an opportunity to come to our community. All kinds of people. I think it is a great way and a great plan.'

This viewpoint was shared by Mayor Geoffrey Dawe and Councillor Paul Pirri, both who said there has to be some compromise here. Councillor Pirri said he found it 'difficult to believe' some around the table would say they do not want units with just two parking spots because that would compact things and say in the same breath more affordable housing is needed.

'We have realities we need to deal with. One is the reality of the growth targets we have been assigned, whether we like it or not. We have to put them somewhere,' said Mayor Dawe. '? We have to be responsible in providing a range of product for people to move into, some of that product is going to be smaller and therefore it is going to be less expensive and therefore it is going to be affordable.'

In the time it took the previous week's committee recommendations to come to Council, however, one of the more vocal critics of the parking issue at that week's meeting changed his mind for the final vote. Councillor John Gallo said after a conversation with

Marco Ramunno, Aurora's Director of Planning, that he was "still quite hesitant" but "hopeful" on the plan and trying to find the balance with an affordable community.

"I think the houses that are dealing with these two parking spots are mainly the ones who are geared towards affordable housing. I am really hoping that is the case," said Councillor Gallo. "I am also hopeful we are going to be able to implement parking and educating those homeowners of what they are purchasing, how many parking spaces those purchasers will have and those things are in place and the development community is aware."