

Council votes to forge ahead on Mavrinac agreement

By Brock Weir

Aurora will forge ahead with exercising its first right of refusal for the sale of potential parkland on Mavrinac Boulevard.

Councillors last week ratified a decision made the previous week at the Committee level to take the 'next steps' in exploring how to secure a six acre plot of land near the northeast corner of Bayview Avenue and Wellington Street.

The land in question is a block formerly earmarked for the York Catholic District School Board. It was previously billed as a site for either a school or a park, but that was thrown into question when the Board decided to release any rights they had to the property, changing direction.

Under the subdivision agreement for the 2B Lands between Aurora and Minto Communities, the Town has the right of first refusal to purchase the land at a price determined at the time the agreement was set. This is a claim Minto contends (see below), but Councillors have voted to press ahead under the terms of the agreement.

'We, as a Town, have an obligation to enforce our contracts and clauses,' said Mayor Geoffrey Dawe. 'My opinion is we have a right in that subdivision agreement. I was explicit last week that I don't see this as making a leap that this is going to be a park or anything else. I am doing this because the Town needs to confirm the integrity of our agreements.'

Councillor Wendy Gaertner expressed similar views both last week, and the previous week.

'I believe this supports what we were elected to do and that is to do [the] very best we can for our residents,' she said. 'I believe it shows we are serious about our contracts being honoured.'

Some Councillors, however, were not so enthusiastic about going forward with the recommendation to exercise the right of first refusal, arguing it is leading the residents down the garden path in creating a sense of false hope.

'When you choose to exercise the right of first refusal, it shows intent to complete the deal,' argued Councillor Michael Thompson. '[This] raises those expectations. I have already had residents in that area come up and congratulate us because we have chosen to exercise the right of first refusal. They are under the absolute belief that we are going to purchase it and turn it into a park. They are not interested in reading all the reports. The message got whittled down to a simple thing that we are exercising our right of first refusal.'

'Some of us know where this is headed and I can see another situation down the road where we're going to be apologising to the residents again.'

Looking to the future, some Councillors indeed saw trouble ahead. Councillor Paul Pirri, for instance, said he saw 'strong parallels' to traffic calming in Aurora's northeast quadrant which catered to some residents, but not the community as a whole.

'We're providing a service level that goes over and above what the rest of the municipality has and, for me, I cannot do that,' he said. 'I see a very strong, vocal, organized group coming forward making a request and, for me, it is not an equitable request that we can replicate across the municipality.'

Councillor John Gallo, on the other hand, said he did not see any parallels to that. In fact, he said he was 'perplexed' by some of the comments made around the table.

'It's about time we're very clear what we're all saying about this issue,' he said. 'I believe it is time that we have these discussions fully and in full disclosure out in the public so the residents can clearly see what people are saying. I think it is a matter of do you want this property at that price, or don't you? I think that's what the residents want to hear from us. Of course, there might be

stumbling blocks along the way that, yes, we want that property at that price, and we'll have to deal with them as they come.

?We have heard Minto doesn't believe we have the right and that is their right to say that, but I think we need to be steadfast in our views on this.?

Councillor John Abel, long an advocate for Aurora doing everything it can to snap up similar parcels of land for parks and recreation spaces when they become available, contended this is an important decision for Council to consider, even if it is in a relatively small section of Town.?

?I don't think we're showing weak knees,? he said. ?We have been setting this in motion for months.?

For Councillor Evelyn Buck, on the other hand, although she voted in favour of Aurora taking those first steps to see all the options ahead, price is key, particularly if the landowner is going to put up a fight in the courts.

?The whole community needs to know what it is we're taking about because we can be talking about not just \$2.6 million, we can be talking about a least a million more,? she said. ?We have to be looking sensibly and practically about that clause in the agreement in determining what is in the best interests of the community. That is what it comes down to.?