

Council calls for 'Made in Aurora' plan for Affordable Housing

As the affordability crisis continues, Council is looking for a 'Made in Aurora' plan for affordable and attainable housing.

Local lawmakers last week unanimously approved a motion put forward by Mayor Tom Mrakas calling on municipal staff to develop an Affordable Housing Action Plan (AHAP) in conjunction with the ongoing update of the Town's Official Plan (OP).

The vision for the AHAP is to 'guide decision-making on how to address affordable housing and promote attainable housing options for residents through clear objectives and targets specifically designed for implementation within the local Aurora community context,' said Mayor Mrakas in his motion.

Speaking to the motion at the Council table, Mayor Mrakas said looking at this alongside the OP, which will serve as a blueprint for local development through 2051, is an opportunity which should be 'seized,' creating 'action-focused policies that better enforce or ensure affordable or attainable housing for the next 30 years or beyond.'

'There is a housing crisis in Canada and community leaders across this country are responding to an urgent call to action in addressing that crisis,' he said. 'There's broad consensus that more must be done at the municipal level to move from policy to action. Aurora can heed the call to action by developing our own Made in Aurora plan to address housing affordability in the community both now and 30 years from now.'

'We already have the building blocks of a workable plan. Our OP already includes policy options to foster the development of a diverse housing stock through the inclusion of affordable units and low-rise intensification and designated MTSA [Major Transit Station Area] and along transit corridors. We have policies in place that encourage the growth of housing options to meet the needs of all residents including young families and seniors. These are great initiatives, but with provincially mandated projected growth of another 30 per cent over the next 30 years, we are going to need to do more if we are to meet the housing needs of the future.'

Simply stating that more affordable housing is needed isn't enough, Mayor Mrakas contended, and the success of any plan that ultimately comes forward depends on 'evidence-based action.'

'Through the development of a collaborative, community-focused plan driven by engagement with residents, builders, community groups, local partners, and other stakeholders, the Aurora Affordable Housing Action Plan will provide clear objectives and measurable targets for affordable housing options that are specifically designed for implementation within the local Aurora community context,' he continued, adding success will also hinge on a plan being enforceable.

Despite disagreements with the Province over Bill 23 and the abilities of communities like Aurora to determine how they develop, Mayor Mrakas said he didn't anticipate meeting any 'resistance' in going down this road because 'we are all united in a common cause.'

'We can seize the opportunity to use the tools available to us to develop a Made in Aurora affordable housing plan and take another bold step forward in Aurora's movement forward to plan a responsible future.'

While Councillors were supportive of the motion, discussion came down to the details.

Ward 6 Councillor Harold Kim, for instance, said affordable and attainable housing 'can be seen as a euphemism for public or subsidized housing,' and that is not the case.

'I find the greatest challenge for developers of affordable housing, after insufficient funding, is NIMBYism,' said Councillor Kim, referencing the acronym that stands for Not In My Back Yard. 'As we have witnessed recently, NIMBYism is alive and well everywhere and I hope that the Affordable Housing Action Plan incorporates some plan as to how we're going to overcome this'

phenomenon because there's no point having an action plan unless the plan includes education and how we're going to convince local residents to take part in this affordable housing action plan. I hope that's included in the action plan as well.?

Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland said in light of the last Council's efforts to preserve the Town's so-called Stable Neighbourhoods that ?some consideration to that area might be different than other parts of the community.?

?The details of the Action Plan will go down to specific sites with ?tangible targets,? said Marco Ramunno, Aurora's Director of Planning. ?With respect to the mix of housing, affordability level is something we will look at as well. We have seen other housing action plans that establish housing affordability, etc.?

?I don't think we're going to be hindered by Bill 23,? he continued. ?The Provincial plans and the Regional plans and our local plans all speak to affordable housing targets and ensuring there is a mix and range of housing types to meet affordability targets. We're not going to be hindered by Provincial legislation. I think it's a mandate of the Province and York Region to try and implement those targets.?

A draft of the Town's Affordable Housing Action Plan could be before Council as early as ?May or June? of this year, staff said.

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