

Councillor 'shocked' at proposed changes to northeast business park

Lands on the east side of Leslie Street near St. John's Sideroad have been designated as 'prestige' business lands for years, but a potential Official Plan (OP) amendment could lead to a 'shocking' loss of this status, says Ward 3 Councillor Wendy Gaertner.

At issue are plans for a multi-unit industrial building, which, if brought to fruition will be 24,955.89 square metres.

The amendment request would permit new uses on the site, including possible banquet halls, clinics, commercial schools, dry cleaners, self-storage facilities, laundromats, motor vehicle shops, recreation centres, and more.

These uses, says Councillor Gaertner, would dilute that 'adding that the relevant section of the Official Plan (OPA 73) describes the business park as 'a crucial component of Aurora's long-term economic strategy' with assurances that 'employment lands are used to their highest and fullest potential.'

'It is business lands that are supposed to be used to its highest and best value and to provide employment land, and it even says in the statement that using it like that is crucial to Aurora's economic development,' says Councillor Gaertner. 'It's so completely against the land-use planning and against the economic development statement, and now that is hopefully going to be near the 404 interchange, it has the prestige value of signage along the 404. Honestly, I don't understand why we would accept that proposal because it is just so contrary.'

'I thought everyone [on Council] would see [the proposal] and say, 'Oh, no, we can't do this.' John Gallo (Ward 5 Councillor) and I were involved in the planning of the 2C areas' everybody keeps saying we're going to uphold our Official Plan and when it is that black and white ' I just can't finish that sentence.'

Until the matter comes back to the table, Councillor Gaertner says she will speak to her fellow Councillors to see her perspective.

'I'm going to do my best,' she says.

These same sentiments were expressed by Councillor Gaertner at this month's Public Planning meeting where she said the Province 'would like us (Aurora Council) to keep prestige employment land, especially because of its proximity to the 404.'

'It is a very important piece of land for us to keep as prestige employment,' she said. 'It's not going away if somebody doesn't want to develop it as prestige employment at the moment, it is not going to go away or diminish in costs and price to whoever owns it. The OPA specifically says that this land, we're to ensure this employment land is used to the highest and fullest potential.'

'The business park part of the employment land is considered a crucial component of the Town's long-term economic development strategy. As a business park, we don't have many lands left and I think if you look at just south of Wellington, we have changed a lot of them from business park. Those were supposed to be business park lands and we have allowed developers to change them. This is not the time or the land to change the zoning.'

In response, Mayor Tom Mrakas said despite the proposed changes it would still be a business park, a position reiterated by Director of Planning Marco Ramunno.

'The plan identifies this area as business park and within that business park designation it also does allow for some ancillary type of retail commercial uses up to 20 per cent and that has been consistently implemented to the Addison Hall business park to the south and the lands to the west of this subject property,' said Ramunno. 'The application to rezone it and bring it in line with the Business Park designation is to zone it as employment-business park and our zoning bylaw identifies a long list of business park-type of uses which are generically employment-type uses, warehousing, offices, a long list.'

?When we come back with our comprehensive report and the recommendation, we will identify for Council's consideration whether we feel any of these additional uses they're asking for are appropriate or not, but that will come forward in a future report. I think the confusion here is the applicant is asking for some additional uses that are currently not listed in our employment nosiness park zone and? they want to add for some flexibility.?

Following the explanation, Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland said Council needs to be ?mindful of the types of businesses we are going to elect to put there.?

?I agree that it is prime real estate and we want to be very specific on the kinds of industry,? she said. ?Manufacturing is very important, yes there is a great Economic Development and Strategic Plan we're working towards? the applicant hopefully hearing some of the comments? it is very important we have a vision attracting this type of industry and I really encourage you to look at our Economic Development plan and strategic vision and that would fall in line with that.?

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter