

## Protection of 'stable neighbourhoods' examined

By Brock Weir

Should Aurora do more to protect older, stable neighbourhoods from large-scale infill development?

That is a question that will be answered early next year after Council signed off on a staff review on whether existing bylaws and guidelines surrounding stable neighbourhoods are actually being met.

Brought forward by Councillor Wendy Gaertner, members of the public filled Council Chambers last Tuesday night to see how local lawmakers would weigh in on the matter.

First, however, neighbours, particularly from Aurora's west side, had a chance to sound off themselves.

'The overwhelming majority [of the homeowners in my neighbourhood] expressed concerns about recent developments in our area and fully endorse the views expressed here,' said Paul Smith, speaking in favour of Councillor Gaertner's call for a review. 'It is important to remember that Aurora has grown in stages with each subdivision expressing separate and distinctive characteristics. We do not object to development, per se, but we do object to buildings which do not respect our community character.'

'I ask Council to please help your residents protect and preserve the older parts of Town.'

Privacy is one of their chief concerns, he said, when larger homes are shoehorned into the area. Coupled with that are concerns about blocked sun and windfall changing the overall character of the neighbourhood.

For Councillor Wendy Gaertner, the healthy crowd in the audience illustrated the 'dissatisfaction and disappointment' with the status quo.

'Some houses have been permitted that are clearly not compatible with the development that exists,' she said. 'These new homes might be beautiful, of interesting design, but they are so different. They are not in keeping with the character of these older residential neighbourhoods.'

'Residents are not objecting to the building of homes that try and sometimes succeed to be reflective of what exists and therefore enhance the neighbourhood and streetscapes. Change is a reality, larger homes are a reality, but they should complement and not distract from what exists. The intent of this motion is to acknowledge the residents' concerns and determine how we can address them.'

Aurora's Official Plan, she said, is a fundamental planning tool and up for review over the next little while, she added. It is time to look at the zoning bylaws in place to see if they are reflective of what is planned for Aurora.

Councillor Gaertner's motion received widespread support of Council, but with various levels of enthusiasm.

Councillor Paul Pirri, for instance, said a 'balance' needs to be struck in addressing the needs of all property owners.

'I think if we go too far one way, I think our community's property values will suffer as a result and that is something that weighs heavily on my mind as well,' he said.

A similar view was offered by Councillor Harold Kim, who said a 'big monster home' in the neighbourhood could increase property values, an argument which prompted a few chuckles from the crowd.

'Not everyone is going to believe me, but [that's] what over 20 or 30 years of research tells me,' he said. 'I am not telling you I agree with it, but I am just saying I agree that you deserve to have your say: If you want your neighbourhood to have responsible growth, and we all agree with that and want to grow in a certain way, then I am certainly all for that. I just [want] everyone to make their decision based on the right information.'

In coming to his decision, Councillor John Abel referenced efforts made in the last Council term to turn the southeast quadrant of Yonge and Wellington into Aurora's second Heritage District, a suggestion which sparked significant backlash from area property owners.

'The majority of residents [said they were opposed] because they believed it would affect their ability and their property values,' he said. 'We have received a lot of emails, and I would say the majority are in favour of Councillor Gaertner's motion, and I certainly will support that as well. I believe in stable neighbourhoods. I believed in it with the Aurora Ratepayers, the Aurora Village on Temperance Street, and I believed it in the Regency area. I think there is a lot of merit in getting a report and coming back with it.' Going through with a staff study is a 'well-worthwhile' exercise in light of the Official Plan review, added Councillor Mrakas. While it is still some months away, he said Councillor Gaertner's motion was a good first step for staff in making sure definitions and zoning requirements are being met.

'A lot has been said at the table and my view is we have to keep that uniqueness within our community and that is the kind of vision we have set forth,' he said, asking for further information to come back on how other municipalities around Ontario have addressed

this issue. ?I think looking at whether the definitions within our OP do meet what the zoning is saying, I think it is a good first step for us to look at and move forward with."