

Councillor reiterates stance on severances

Further to my letter to the editor of April 15, 2015, and in reference to recent activity related to two OPAs (Official Plan Amendments) seeking severances in mature subdivisions, I add the following:

There will always be a difference of opinion on these issues, but there remains significant pressure on council to hold the line on not allowing severances in existing subdivisions via the OPA process, and to even go as far as to prohibit them altogether by reinforcing regulations that promote stable neighbourhoods.

Many residents can accept that growth and change must occur. We see it happening in new greenfield and brownfield development all around us. But most find it unacceptable that it should be permitted to occur in our mature, old subdivisions.

One of the key drivers behind my explicit position on this issue is the length of time it has taken this municipality to update its Official Plan and Zoning Bylaw. If we had gone through the public processes that were directed by council in 2007, (9 years ago), and again in 2011, we would have more clarity, or at least less incoherence. But currently there is no coherence that I can offer to my constituents.

We have residents who are livid with this ongoing threat to their neighbourhoods as well as with this municipality's slowness to react. Only just now has the zoning bylaw update for King City begun.

The intensification argument is one that can be made, yet defies common sense within the "Places to Grow" context. Subjective arguments can be made to say that these applications "improve" the neighbourhood, yet beauty lies in the eye of the beholder. If you say, "I want to sever my lot to make money," that makes complete sense. Everyone gets it. But the irony is, that is in no way an argument any professional planner could ever defend at the Ontario Municipal Board - even though it's the primary motivator! But when it takes thousands of words and months upon months to construct an argument to say that a severance is "good planning," and to further state that these are not precedent setting, not only does it defy common sense, but such statements sound patently ridiculous, and work only to further promulgate mistrust of our government among individuals on BOTH sides of the argument. It then makes it very easy for me to stand up and say this process is incoherent. The very fact that staff recommended approval on one and not the other, only underscores this incoherence. The term "good planning" begins to sound like a conspiracy, or a joke. Yet this is the system we are confronted with.

The key word in the term "Planning Act" is the word "planning." Official Plan Amendments that seek to alter our subdivisions one slice at a time are "ad hoc," and lack the holistic analysis that people expect should be undertaken before we consider further subdividing what was comprehensively planned in the first place. Until we complete a comprehensive, municipally driven review of our OP and zoning bylaws, where everyone can participate, then amidst this abundance of incoherence, you will see me steadfastly rejecting "ad hoc" redevelopment within our subdivisions.

There can be such a thing as a "friendly amendment," if we can identify a palpable, common sense community benefit. A "friendly amendment" can be characterized as when the municipality and the applicant agree on a mutually beneficial outcome. I think everyone would agree that the amendment council endorsed in 2010 to allow for a grocery store (Coppa's Fresh Market) was a friendly amendment to the King City Community Plan. In such circumstances the applicant and the municipality can walk hand in hand to a mutually beneficial outcome.

But any other attempt to amend our plans is adversarial. When it pits neighbour against neighbour, it is adversarial. When it creates factions within a community, it is adversarial. When it causes scores of residents to come to council to beg us to either stop these severances from happening - it is adversarial.

One thing is certain, the old subdivisions of King City, Nobleton, and Schomberg offer something different within the GTA context. If you want smaller lots, there's certainly an abundance of those popping up everywhere.

But our existing King Township subdivisions, with large mature lots, are like sanctuaries within the context of current provincial planning legislation, and this current legislation, if left unchanged, will never permit a Kingscross Estates, or a Springhill Gardens to ever, EVER, be built again.

Cleve Mortelliti

Councillor, Ward 1