

Protection of neighbourhood character concerns everyone

BY JILL MCWHINNIE

You've lived in a tidy bungalow on a large lot in Stouffville for 50 years.

The house next door is sold and the new owner decides to build a monster home that towers over your house, has a prominent garage and is much closer to the road than your home or others on the street. Suddenly the whole character of the street has changed. Think that couldn't happen in your neighbourhood? Think again.

In response to the possibility of scenarios like this, town council has directed its staff to assess the adequacy of the existing policies and standards in Stouffville's secondary plan and zoning bylaw to protect established neighbourhoods from development that would be incompatible with existing homes. On June 16, the department of development services and its consultants held a public information session to engage residents in this discussion.

Despite numerous notices in the local paper and on the town website, four residents attended. The meagre turnout was surprising, given the relevance of these policies to all Stouffville homeowners.

'There can be no doubt that the distinctiveness and character of our existing neighbourhoods are largely responsible for the charm and appeal of our town.'

Ongoing development and redevelopment pressure within the community, and the recent provincial imperative requiring municipalities to prioritize intensified, compact development and provide a broader mix of housing choices, could set the stage for significant impacts on what have been stable neighbourhoods of a consistently built form. For example, in a neighbourhood where 50-foot setbacks and heights of 15 feet are the norm, current zoning standards in that area could permit the construction of a new home with a 25-foot setback and a height of 35 feet, a full storey and a half higher than the existing homes. The goal of the process now underway is to craft a new zoning bylaw which will accommodate provincial directives and the rights of landowners to deal with their properties, while maintaining the integrity and character of existing neighbourhoods.

A first step in the process has been the preparation of an inventory of residential neighbourhoods within the area of the Stouffville secondary plan. Seven neighbourhoods have been identified and described, based on age, location, dominant characteristics of the housing stock, and lot sizes. The potential impacts of redevelopment under the current zoning regime have been assessed for

each area. Some neighbourhoods are far more vulnerable to significant impacts than others — in one established neighbourhood, 36 new lots could potentially be created in the existing land area under the zoning currently applicable there.

The new zoning bylaw and related policies would take into consideration the individual characteristics of each neighbourhood and would require any development or redevelopment in established neighbourhoods to be consistent with, and sympathetic to, the existing homes. The consultants have recommended that the best way to ensure this is by reference to the surrounding properties, rather than the application of quantitative measures.

Thus, the new bylaw could require that the height of an infill structure must be within one metre of the height of the existing properties on each side, and that lot coverage and yard areas must also be compatible to avoid the much-feared monster home scenario.

Other matters under discussion are second suite apartments in existing residential properties and the conversion of single dwelling units into multi-unit residences, both of which are potentially justified by provincial policies requiring municipalities to provide greater choice and affordability in housing.

The trend toward the operation of home-based businesses in residential zones is another important, emerging issue. What is permissible, and what types of businesses are incompatible with residential use?

In the section dealing with the proposed changes to Stouffville's secondary plan, the discussion paper notes that each neighbourhood has its own identity. There can be no doubt that the distinctiveness and character of our existing neighbourhoods are largely responsible for the charm and appeal of our town. Here is an opportunity for all of us to have a role in determining the policies that will shape the appearance and character of those neighbourhoods for years to come.

Copies of the Stouffville established residential neighbourhood discussion paper are available on the town's website (www.townofsw.com), at the Stouffville library, and the development services counter at the municipal office. Town staff and the consultants will be reviewing the comments received throughout the summer.

In September, another information session will be held, at which time detailed draft secondary plan policies and zoning bylaw regulatory standards will be presented for public review and discussion. In October, a report to council will be presented on recommended measures to protect the character of existing neighbourhoods of Stouffville. Please take some time this summer to read the discussion paper and provide input to this important process.

Jill McWhinnie lives in Stouffville and is a regular contributor to Whitchurch-Stouffville Living.

It's time to recall moments of Canadian pride

BY CONRAD BOYCE

Every year when Canada Day rolls around, amid the flags and parades and fireworks, I'm sure many of us pause a moment and reflect on why it's good to be Canadian.

If we were born and raised here, we think about how growing up Canadian has made us the people we are today. If we're relative newcomers, Canada Day might make us think about whether this place was the right choice. Whoever we are, and however uncool we might think it is to be patriotic, we can't look at the red-and-white flag with the leaf in the middle, without feeling something about our Canadian-ness.

Having been a Canadian for over half a century, I've had a lot of Canada/Dominion Days to consider what that means.

A few months ago, someone (not a Canuck) asked me if I was proud to be Canadian, and why. I got to musing on that and realized that it's not why you're proud so much as when. There are moments in each life that cause a stirring of national pride, and for this little essay I decided to choose my top three; the most prominent events or occasions that made me want to paint the maple leaf on my forehead, even though I've spent most of my life in parts of Canada where the maple doesn't even grow.

As it happens, each of the three happened in a different locale and none of them had anything to do with sports teams.

The first was when I was 13 years old, in Grade 9. My father had decided, on a whim, to move the family to Honolulu. Here I was, at Robert Louis Stevenson Intermediate School, surrounded, for the first time, by kids of many different races. It was exciting but scary. Hawaii had only been a state for four years, so my classmates knew little about the United States, let alone Canada. Nevertheless, my Canadian-ness made me a bit of a celebrity and, in my geography class, the teacher asked me to teach a lesson about Canada. I ended up going on for days and, by the end of it, I'm sure those kids — and teacher — knew more about Canada than anyone else in the entire state of Hawaii.

Less than four years later, and back

in Alberta, I graduated from high school at a time when nationalistic fervour was at its height: Centennial Year, 1967.

Expo 67 in Montreal was, of course, the highlight of the year, and I had the good fortune to attend twice; once with a city-wide high school choir, and again for a national United Nations mock general assembly. Each time I travelled to Montreal by train, and returned by plane. Not only was Expo an incredible source of pride — how could Canada mastermind the creation of such an incredible place? — but the cross-Canada trips gave me a grasp of the marvelous diversity of this country. I wanted to learn more, and travel more, and now there are few corners of the country I haven't poked my nose into.

For my last Top 3 moment, we have to flash forward 28 years to the spring of 1995. I'd been living in the Yukon for over a decade and had a job as program co-ordinator with the Yukon Science Institute, a non-profit group dedicated to creating greater public awareness of scientific work in the territory.

I organized a lecture series and a radio program, scientific conferences and expeditions and wrote a regular science column for the newspaper. I also put together a Yukon-wide science fair and arranged for Yukon students to participate in the national fair, held every May in a different part of the country.

After only a couple of years of this, I, and my colleagues at the Y.S.I., boldly decided to bid on holding the national science fair in Whitehorse (pop. 30,000), even though it had never been located in such a small town, one without a university, or in such a remote location. We worked hard on the bid and, much to our surprise and delight, it worked. Four years later, hundreds of the brightest young people from across Canada flew on several charter flights into Whitehorse and had the week of their young lives. I felt pride that we had pulled it off, but also, as I watched all those kids from Newfoundland and Saskatchewan and Toronto throwing themselves into a Yukon experience, I realized once again what a wonderful country we live in.

So it doesn't matter where you are, Whitehorse, Waikiki or wherever, the joy of being a Canadian can strike you when you least expect it.

MOLLER INSURANCE

Home ★ Auto

905-642-2745

64 Sandiford Drive, Unit 1,
STOUFFVILLE

Eye Care in Stouffville

with Retinal Scanning Technology



Drs. McDowell and Genin
Optometrists • 6085 Main St. • 905 642-3937