

\$19m Joint Ops Centre takes step forward



By Brock Weir

The future of Aurora's proposed \$19 million new Joint Operations Centre became clearer this week as Councillors tentatively approved a budget to make the building a reality.

The \$18,971,000 project came before Council this week at a Special General Committee meeting, which, now approved, will likely be ratified later this month.

If given the green light, the Joint Operations Centre will combine Aurora's Parks and Recreation Department under one roof with the Works yard, currently housed on Scanlon Court. While that land has been conditionally sold, Aurora has purchased new land near the top of Industrial Parkway North for the new building.

According to a report before Ilmar Simanovskis, Aurora's Director of Parks and Recreation this week, detailed drawings for the site are now 70 per cent complete. So far, the project is expected to span 11.55 acres and include a three level main building which will house offices, workspaces, as well as storage for equipment, Aurora's paper records, as well as artefacts currently in the Town's Heritage Salvage Program, with an additional salt dome and proposed greenhouses.

The Joint Operations Centre is expected to set an example when it comes to 'green buildings'. Council previously approved shooting for significant environmental certification, eventually aiming towards achieving a LEED Gold Standard, with such initiatives as 'green roofs' to support plants, LED lighting, and rain water harvesting systems.

All of this, however, comes with that \$19 million price tag. To make the project a reality, municipal staff are proposing debt financing the construction of the building. Council deferred exploring options on going into debt for the new facility last month. There is not enough money readily available in municipal coffers to see the project through to completion, if one excludes Aurora's \$34 million Hydro Reserve Funds, and this week's discussions will look to close that gap.

'I was pleased to see this,' said Mayor Geoffrey Dawe ahead of last month's deferral. 'There has been some concern with regards to debt financing these potential projects, so I am happy to see [Town Treasurer Dan] Elliott come forward with some alternative methods of financing.'

'It certainly does not impact our current reserves. I look forward to seeing as we move forward on various projects if we can still get even more creative.'

The 'creativity' in Mr. Elliott's report calls on Council to give the green light to establishing a construction financing line of credit with the province at the going interest rate with an upset limit fixed on the cost of the Joint Operations Centre. At the same time, they will also be talked with looking at further programs, grants, and rebates to help offset the cost. It will still be a little while yet,

however, before the full cost of construction will be known. That will become clear when the final tender for construction is approved by Council, said Mr. Elliott in his report, noting that although his department looked into internally financing the project, going external was the best way to go.

?The new Joint Operations Centre was required to update and modernize an old facility which had long passed its design capacity and was no longer able to support Aurora's operational needs,? said Mr. Elliott in his report. ?Renovation, expansion and reconfiguring had all been studied, however, the site was not of sufficient size for our current needs.

?Normally, replacement of Town Infrastructure is funded by tax-sourced reserve funds, while growth related infrastructure needs are funded by development charges. In the case of this project, the Town currently does not have sufficient replacement funding, nor does it have sufficient development charge funding on hand to finance the project.?

Further funding, however, could come in the form of lands currently owned by the Town on Leslie Street. Earmarked for business development, they are currently on the market. The Town is also banking on the pending ?conditional sale? on the current works yard on Scanlon Court, just north of Industrial Parkway North and Centre Street.

?These two sources of funding have been confirmed by Council as potential sources of funding for the Joint Operations Centre, as well as development charges from future development as expected as part of the 2C lands development,? said Mr. Elliott. ?Today, however, these funds are not in hand [and] accordingly, debt financing for this project is necessary.?

In his report, a number of options were considered from debentures through internally financing the projects from the remaining reserve funds, but going against that as it would tie up the funds for the long-term, going through Industry Canada and taking out a line of credit was deemed to be the best option ? and the most effective.