

Public's interest best served by LED purchase, says Town

By Brock Weir

The 'best interests of the community' were served by Aurora moving ahead with a \$3.5 million plan to switch out the Town's existing streetlights with energy-saving LED alternatives, despite concerns raised by a local resident last week.

This was the word of Town Solicitor Warren Mar, responding to a delegation by Aurora resident Luis Rodriguez, an employee of Honeywell and Board Chair of Energy Services Association of Canada, which represents a number of providers of LED lights.

Mr. Rodriguez told Council the Town's decision to move forward with the contract to LAS Real Term, an arm of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario to provide this service, a service used by over 120 of Ontario's municipalities effectively shut out Honeywell and other companies from the bidding process.

'The Town excluded well-recognized manufacturers of LED products and what concerns me even more is the Town excluded a whole host of subcontractors, some of which may be businesses that reside in Aurora, from effectively bidding on this installation work,' said Mr. Rodriguez who insisted he was not speaking as an employee of Honeywell, but was less definitive on whether he was speaking in his capacity as Board Chair for Energy Services.

'In my 35 years at Honeywell, if there is anything I have learned to coach clients on it is the best overall view for an organization can only be derived from an open and competitive process. There are all kinds of opportunities in terms of different warranty, different levels, different prices on the product itself. While it is true LAS has certainly been the recipient of a lot of business throughout the Province of Ontario, many other municipalities have chosen to have an open procurement process to select a partner through an RFP. That RFP includes various evaluation criteria such as the experience of the firm. It is important because once the Town selects that proponent to work with based on that set of criteria, the Town can then work with that proponent to effectively go out and tender these subcontracts, tender to various lighting manufacturers, and it is all open and transparent.

'The Town will be well-served, but I am not sure that the Town is getting the best overall value in terms of warranty products and, frankly, in terms of price. I am absolutely concerned and hope this is not precedent setting that we, for a \$3 million project, aren't going out and giving the marketplace an opportunity to bid.'

Aurora's decision to proceed with the program earlier this month was 'being discussed by major multinational companies,' he added, but some Councillors questioned the purpose of Mr. Rodriguez' delegation, including Councillor Michael Thompson who asked if these companies were also discussing the other 127 municipalities that have followed this path. He replied that Aurora had simply been the most recent example.

'It comes off to me like Honeywell is more concerned about the loss of their market share than the procurement process, the way you were phrasing your questions,' said Councillor Thompson.

Councillor Harold Kim, on the other hand, was not as convinced.

'I think it is unfair if any of us were to say Mr. Rodriguez is being subjectively biased here,' he said. 'I have to assume he is here because he is a resident and concerned about the process.'

Nevertheless, Mr. Rodriguez' concerns did not inspire a change of heart from Council. Responding to the outlined concerns, Mr. Mar said the Town's procurement process had been followed 'to the letter' and he was confident the best interests of the community were served.

'I think it is very easy when the procurement process is complete for vendors, after the fact, to state I could have done it better,' said Mr. Mar. 'That is great because I always expect them to do that, but it undermines the procurement process if you do so. I think 128

municipalities speaks for itself. We have been able to review what they have done. We haven't been the leader and we haven't necessarily been the last guy on the block. In following along with other people's experience with the LAS process, it has been glowingly positive.?

Aurora's procurement bylaw does not allow for preference to be given to local companies, noted Mr. Mar.