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Greenhouse sprouts additional cost for Joint Operations Centre

By Brock Weir

When Aurora's new Joint Operations Centre was completed, it was touted as coming in under budget, but a plan to install a $157,000 greenhouse floor left Councillors questioning whether that was actually the case last week.

Council tentatively approved a contract to pour the floor of the new greenhouse at the new Industrial Parkway North facility at the committee level last week to the tune of $157,695.

If that decision is not ratified at Council this week, it could mean Aurora's streets will be a little less colourful this spring and summer as no greenhouse would mean few to no street plants. While the funds would come partially out of the money already earmarked for the JOC as well as reserves, some lawmakers questioned the optics of another expense.

?Much was made on the Joint Operations Centre coming in under budget,? said Councillor Michael Thompson. ?This is the second item that has come before us in the last few months on additional pieces [after a new fuel dispensing station already within the budget]. My concern is we set a budget for the construction of the facility and we were proud to say that it came in under budget, and there is a perception now that with these two items perhaps they were left off to allowsus to come in under budget and now we're dealing with them separately. I think it is important for us to say to the residents exactly what is going on here so that they know the project came in as budgeted.?

According to Ilmar Simanovskis, Aurora's Director of Infrastructure, the greenhouse floor was intended to be part of the original contract and there was an expectation that if the Town took it out of the contract and went it alone costs could be reduced. But, after going through the tendering process, this turned out not to be the case.

?We need to do it and it is going to cost us the same,? he said.

Harking back to a discussion at Council last month on the Town's speed cushion pilot project which was, for a time, up in the air after Council considered suspending the program and re-tendering the project in the New Year to take advantage of competitive pricing, Councillor Harold Kim questioned whether this greenhouse floor would be a candidate for that way of thinking as well.

?It is always a debate,? said Mr. Simanovskis. ?When the refined budget was brought in, it was still fairly high but at the time we felt we needed to get something moving on this particular piece of the project to allow for (Parks and Recreation director Al) Downey and his staff to have use of the greenhouse this winter. I would suggest considering the fact there is some time pressure from the perspective of the operation, we are recommending proceeding with the price at this time.?

A delay would make it ?very difficult to actually have plants on the street next summer,? he added.

The concrete slab floor slated for the JOC is no ordinary concrete slab. It includes a drainage system, systems for stormwater from the greenhouse work, and excavation. A lot of work, he said, has been done to make this as ?efficient? as possible, but Councillors questioned whether other efficient options were still on the table, including an asphalt alternative.

To this, however, Mr. Downey said an asphalt alternative might have been easier to install if the greenhouse wasn't already built and in place as it is easier to pour and it will be a challenge to sufficiently compact the asphalt as needed.

After Councillor Kim questioned whether this was ?poor planning? in figuring out the order of operations on the construction, Mr. Simanovskis said he would ?never say anything is the result of poor planning.?

?Everything is the result of proper sequencing,? he said. ?When you are dealing with different projects,
different seasons, construction activities that are occurring concurrently or adjacent to certain areas, certain activities have to happen before others. As the project was proceeding, it became evident that proceeding with the installation of the greenhouse was the preferred direction for a number of reasons, one not being the least [was] the manufacturer was not suggesting building a pad in advance because you need to build the foundations and where the foundations end up, they determine where that goes?

The reason we decided to take the greenhouse floor out of the project was the sequencing didn't make any difference whether we did it now
or later.?