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Protecting automotive sector backed by Council

By Brock Weir

A motion from Mayor Geoff Dawe calling on the Federal Government to speak up for the automotive sector in upcoming NAFTA talks received the backing of Council.

Council voted in favour of the Mayor's motion, which stems from his position on the Auto Mayors Caucus, calling on the powers-that-be to listen to the concerns of communities such as Aurora, which rely heavily on the auto sector, when wading into the thorny process of renegotiating the North American Free Trade Agreement with the U.S. Government.

Following Council's endorsement, Aurora will send a letter to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau underscoring the importance of the automotive industry to innumerable communities and sectors across the country.

?The automotive sector has been a vital part of the Canadian economy for almost a century,? reads the draft letter which received Council's green light. ?Mine is one of dozens of communities who benefit enormously from the growth, innovation and good, middle-class jobs supported by Canada's automotive industry. It is also one of dozens of communities whose residents are deeply concerned by the US government's announcement to renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

?It is difficult to overstate the deep level of integration within the Canadian and American automotive sectors. This special economic relationship was first recognized in 1965 with the signing of the Canada-US Auto Pact. In 2016, Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne and Michigan Governor Ric Snyder signed a Memorandum of Understanding calling for increased partnership and cooperation within our automotive sectors.

?NAFTA governs nearly every aspect of the trade relationships within the Great Lakes manufacturing cluster. Even minor changes to those established relationships could have enormous consequences for jobs and economic growth on both sides of the Canada-US border.

?The automotive sector is far too important to be made anything but a key priority in upcoming NAFTA renegotiations. Over 101,000 Ontarians are directly employed in auto, and an estimated 300,000 additional jobs are created indirectly by the economic activity it supports nationwide. It represents Canada's largest manufacturing sector, Ontario's chief export, and the economic heart of dozens of communities like mine.?

Here in Aurora, it is estimated nearly 2,000 local jobs are the direct result of the automotive sector including the Town being the head office for auto parts manufacturer Magna International and a number of off-shoot factories under that umbrella, along with Van-Rob Stamping and Axiom.

These local ties were highlighted by Mayor Dawe in his pitch to Council last week, but Council opted to broaden the horizons of the letter.

Rather than a simple letter to the Prime Minister, they suggested sending it to all municipalities through the Association of Municipalities of Ontario and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities.

?I think the more municipalities get behind it, the more weight it comes to bear on those provincial and federal governments,? said Councillor Michael Thompson. ?From the experience Councillor Mrakas and I have had with OMB (Ontario Municipal Board) reform and getting other municipalities behind it, I think it can only further help the cause.?

Councillor Tom Mrakas agreed: ?I think it is great for us to move forward and I agree the more weight the better behind this and you will probably get better results.?