

INSIDE AURORA: The Decision

By Scott Johnston

?What's the harm in having these retail stores in Town??

The mayor looked up at the speaker, and behind her at the packed public gallery of the Council chambers. He had never seen so many people there.

Of course, Aurora had rarely been faced with such a divisive issue. After all, it wasn't every day that a decision had to be made to allow the sale within Town of an addictive and potentially harmful substance.

The lady at the microphone continued. ?The sale of this product is legal in Canada. Why should Aurora miss out on much-needed tax revenue and other benefits, which will instead flow to neighbouring municipalities who have opted to sell it??

Open Forum had already provided a cross section of opinion on the subject from residents. There were some, like the current speaker, who felt that it would be difficult for the Town to prevent the sale of a legal product. Why punish residents who did want to partake in it by making them drive out of Town?

On the other hand, a number of people that evening had spoken out in opposition, citing the risk of children becoming addicted, and the potential health concerns. Even with sales limited to adults, and assurances that retail outlets would not be located in proximity to schools, many feared the danger was too great.

The focus on abuse was not restricted to children. A few speakers had pointed out the inevitable dangers of adults over-indulging and driving.

The arguments on both sides had been both passionate and heated, with speakers at times receiving cheers, boos, and other reactions from the crowd.

As the current speaker wrapped up her remarks, the mayor addressed the floor.

?Thank you to everyone who has presented their views here at Open Forum. Council appreciates the time you have taken to share your thoughts on this important issue. We will take all of your comments into consideration, as we now discuss the issue.?

The mayor turned to his colleagues seated on either side of him. ?Does anyone wish to speak on this matter??

One councillor on his left had already excused himself from the discussions, claiming a conflict of interest. The mayor recognized a councillor sitting to his right.

?I've heard from many residents on this matter,? the councillor stated, looking out at the gallery. ?I have also spoken to the Chief of Police, and he says there is nothing that can be done, apart from enforcing existing rules and legislation. This is a legal substance, after all. I don't think we have much of a choice but to opt in.?

?I disagree,? the next councillor countered. ?There are many residents who are against these sales, and in my mind, far too many unknowns on this issue. I won't be supporting it.?

The remaining councillors each had their own say. Many spoke of the feedback and comments they had heard from residents on the issue over the past few months. They all seemed to reference internal conflicts, and the difficulty of their decision.

However, as the discussions continued, it appeared that despite the opposition to establishing a retail store, the decision would likely go in the other direction.

Finally, it was time for the Mayor to call for the vote.

In the end, seven members of Council were in favour, and one was opposed, with one other abstaining.

The Mayor made the final pronouncement. ?The Motion on the floor carries. The Town of Aurora will allow the sale of alcohol, through the first LCBO retail store to be established at the corner of Yonge and Brookland.?

There was a loud and emotional reaction from the crowd. As staff endeavoured to provide some order in the Chamber, the Mayor sat back deep in thought.

The 1970s were certainly turning into an exciting decade in Aurora. It would be interesting to see what other issues the future had in store for the Town.

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