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Business Improvement Area business plan, tax levy set for green light

By Brock Weir

A tax levy on several businesses and properties in Aurora's historic Downtown Core to help fund the new Downtown Business Improvement Area is set to get the green light this week.

Last Tuesday, while sitting at the Committee level, Council tentatively approved a new business plan and associated tax levy proposed by Anthony Ierullo, Aurora's Manager of Economic Development, for the Aurora Business Improvement Area (BIA).

Aurora's BIA was formally established last September by a group of property and business owners in Aurora's Downtown Core with a goal towards driving people and business back towards the centre of Town through events, improved streetscapes and much more.

The BIA encompasses a stretch of Wellington Street East from Berczy Street in the east to Yonge Street in the west, and from Yonge Street heading south to Church Street.

Members of the BIA Board originally presented their vision and associated business plan to Council on April 16, and this plan includes a tax that would be levied on all property owners living within the boundaries of the BIA, for a total of $40,000.

?At the April 16 General Committee meeting, the BIA Board of Management presented their 2019 Business Plan and Budget to Council,? said Mr. Ierullo in his report before last Tuesday's meeting. ?The total amount of the BIA levy is established by the BIA's annual budget process. The levy is typically distributed proportionally amongst all the commercial properties in the downtown Improvement Area. This distribution is based on the relative assessments of the properties paying the BIA levies. The final billing will be issued in June 2019. All eligible properties within the BIA Boundary must pay the BIA levy and cannot opt out of the association.

?The proposed 2019 BIA levy is $40,000, as per the 2019 Business Plan and Operating Budget submitted by the Aurora BIA. The proposed Business Plan includes funding for marketing and promotion, business attraction and member engagement. In order to allow for the collection of the final non-residential tax billings, it is necessary to pass a bylaw to outline the proposed levy. The Special Charge will allow for the collection of the $40,400 BIA levy. This amount will be collected from the member properties within the BIA and will have no direct impact on the general property tax base rate.?

Council's approval this week
will be required to make the tax levy a reality.

In addition to the tax levy,
the BIA is looking to hit the ground running on making streetscape improvements to Yonge and Wellington. As part of Aurora's 2019 Capital Budget, Council conditionally approved $730,000 for area streetscape improvements and the BIA is now looking for Council to allow access to this fund for the creation of BIA-related promotional banners for the core.

?The activities proposed in
the approved Capital Budget for streetscape improvements include $150,000 to develop historic downtown promotional banners for area events and seasons,? said Mr. Ierullo. ?Staff will work with the BIA to explore the opportunity to utilize a portion of the Capital Budget for the banners and advise Council on the details in a future report.?

A BIA, according to organizers ?is integral to advancing
a distinct, livable, vibrant and resilient business district in its local community? and the historic downtown is the obvious candidate for such a district. Downtowns represent ?sustainable development, making best use of our existing infrastructure and creating compact communities that encourage walking, cycling and transit use? while having ?historic connections to the origins of the community.?
They define their mission statement as ?a volunteer-run organization committed to improving and promoting the Aurora Historical Business District through investment and advocacy to build and maintain its position as Aurora's premier shopping, business and entertainment destination.?
Their goals are to use membership fees and sponsorship opportunities to ?revitalize and beautify the Aurora historical centre and make it a destination for local residents to work, shop and play? and ?provide opportunities for area businesses to thrive through community events and focused advertising.?
Their plan includes a three-year outlook to revitalize and beautify the downtown core through street benches, lamp post banners, historic metal building and lawn signs, piped in street music, building murals and a historic metal archway, all to be sourced locally wherever possible.

Community events proposed within their plan include an
on-street kickoff to upcoming seasons of the Aurora Farmers' Market, an expanded Aurora Chamber Street Festival and Canada Day program in the summer, keeping stores open during each occasion and providing incentives for people to patronize the local stores while they're there.

Also being floated is a ?Taste of Aurora? on an August
Saturday that will see a street closure with food being served by local restaurants and vendors all to the sounds of live music.