

Project manager approved to share the load of Joint Operations Centre

By Brock Weir

A new project manager will be appointed to oversee the completion of Aurora's new Joint Operations Centre on Industrial Parkway North.

Council approved the appointment last week, following extensive discussions over the need and the timing of the appointment. While the costs for the new position is already included within the Joint Operations Centre's (JOC) \$26 million budget, Councillors agreed it was better late than never but questioned why such a manager was not appointed to steer other big ticket municipal projects, such as the newly renovated Aurora Family Leisure Complex (AFLC).

“It is important for us to identify why the decision was not made to adopt that same policy and have a project manager to help with the Complex,” said Councillor Michael Thompson. “As we all know, there has been a lot of comment from residents regarding the Leisure Complex, some of the delays were out of our hands with regards to winter and things like that, but there were other things as well.”

At the time, municipal staff felt they had enough resources to steer the AFLC project itself as changes were renovations to an existing facility, according to Ilmar Simanovskis, Aurora's Director of Infrastructure.

“The challenge emerged with this request when you overlay the delays with the AFLC and the efforts required at the Joint Operations Centre. The issues that were emerging were well in hand with regards to staff experience. The JOC is of a much smaller scale and a much larger time commitment, and that is where this additional resource became valuable.”

Until last week, the management of the JOC had been in Mr. Simanovskis' hands, but as the project continued, he said he found it increasingly difficult to devote the time that was needed to the project, while balancing other strains put on his department.

“The challenge with this project is I am the only individual in the department who has building and construction experience, so it is challenging to put an internal manager on the project where it is not something of their strength,” added Mr. Simanovskis, following questions from Councillor Tom Mrakas on why a project manager couldn't be found internally through existing municipal staff. “My time is limited and my efforts on this project over the last year have been extensive. What this is doing is both augmenting my abilities to deliver on that individual project as well as my other responsibilities.”

Making this appointment and, in turn, the completion of the JOC particularly timely is the sale of the current works yard on Scanlon Court. The JOC is intended to combine Aurora's Departments of Public Works and Parks and Recreation, under one roof. The current Scanlon Court site has already been sold to Thermogenics, the Aurora-based manufacturer of industrial boilers, who are anxious to expand their existing operations.

“It is important we deliver [the land] to Thermogenics as quickly as we can,” said Aurora CAO Neil Garbe. “They have been patient with us, but this would allow them to expand and employ another 200 people and keep that firm in Town. It is a unique company and is a great employer. We want to make sure we do everything we can to both secure the money for those properties as well as keep that business in Aurora.”

With the new project manager in place, it is now time to look ahead to the completion of the JOC. To this end, Councillor Harold Kim said he would like to have key performance indicators (KPIs) in place to see how the project manager has performed, any shortcomings, and if he or she was a real asset to the project.