

Aurora looks at selling surplus lands, new armoury to finance JOC

By Brock Weir

In looking for a way to finance new and upcoming projects, Aurora could consider selling its surplus land.

The recommendation to have a review of properties tucked in and around Town which could be sold was passed by Council last week amid a debate on the future of the former Aurora Hydro building.

The large building on Industrial Parkway South near Sheppard's Bush Conservation Area has, in recent months, been a political hot potato once again.

Now home to the Queen's York Rangers through a lease with the Department of National Defence (DND), and re-dubbed the Lieutenant-Governor John Graves Simcoe Armoury, some Councillors have consistently expressed dissatisfaction with the lease agreement, but those voices have become louder as Council proceeds with the Joint Operations Centre (JOC).

Saying anything in the future would be contingent on the DND and the Rangers to continue their presence at the building, Councillor Michael Thompson moved a motion to task staff to report on the possibility of selling the Hydro Building and using the proceeds to help fund the JOC.

‘The intent of the old Hydro building was to use it for the expansion of the Parks Department and take some of that pressure off Scanlon Court and then, along the way, the decision was made to change the plan and the building was leased out,’ said Councillor Thompson. ‘At that point, it really became surplus to our needs. We don't need it for the JOC. If we approve [that] plan and move forward with the other property, yes, we have a tenant there but it is surplus to our needs.’

‘We don't need to be a landlord, we choose to be a landlord. It is good just to get a report back from staff and find out what our other possibilities are, the appraisal price and other considerations [and] I would very much like to approach the DND and see if there is any interest in them buying it and securing the future.’

With the JOC funded two-thirds from development charges, other options need to be explored, he concluded, noting he has no intention of disrupting the QYR and their value to Aurora.

Councillors agreed it would be a ‘worthwhile investigation’ to see all the potential options which could be on the table and voted unanimously for the report.

‘I love the fact that the Queen's York Rangers are there and it is a good home for them, but there might be opportunities,’ agreed Councillor Sandra Humfries. ‘I think it will help us understand the scenarios and a perspective on which way we should be going.’

For some around the table, however, looking specifically at the Hydro Building did not go far enough. According to Councillor John Abel, every property around Aurora currently owned by the municipality, large and small, should be reviewed with the potential sale of which to go towards offsetting the cost of the JOC.

‘Give us a list of all the properties we own in Town and see which ones would be viable to help sell for the JOC,’ he said. ‘I have been told there are small properties we own and I think we should be exploring segments here and there and recoup the value of them and help defray the costs of [the JOC].’

According to Aurora CAO Neil Garbe, the current lease with the DND for the Rangers is something that needs to be given due consideration as they have a 10-year lease which began in 2011, renewable with a five year term ‘which cannot be broken.’

The last Council negotiated the contract, elaborated Town Solicitor Warren Mar, with no termination clause.

?There is no termination clause provided for in the agreement as discussed between the DND and the Town,? said Mr. Mar. ?The only way the Town can get out of that agreement is to negotiate the termination with the DND.?