

Climate change could impact future tax bills

By Brock Weir

Due to increasing storms and water flows, the costs of maintaining Aurora's stormwater management system will "more than double" in the next 10 years, according to staff, and that could result in a hit on the taxpayer.

Anca

Mihail, Aurora's Manager of Engineering, says costs are on the rise and a new approach needs to be taken to make sure any hit on taxpayers is fair and justified.

In her

report to Council, Ms. Mihail said consultants retained by the Town have found, after analysing several municipalities across the Province, stormwater management per capita ranges from \$17 to \$51, and Aurora falls in the upper half of that range at \$36.

An

additional study commissioned by Newmarket, she notes, pegged a "healthy per capita stormwater budget" at \$45 to \$50.

"Municipalities

in Ontario use a variety of approaches for recovering costs related to stormwater management," said Ms. Mihail. "Presently, many Ontario municipalities have either recently completed or are in the process of completing a review of their stormwater funding approach and rates. However, at present, the most common or conventional form of funding is the General Property Tax Base, which means stormwater projects will compete with other municipal priorities for funding.

"Since

1998, Aurora removed the responsibility of funding the Town's stormwater infrastructure from the property tax bill and established a user fee, creating a dedicated, stable and predictable funding outlook for this type of infrastructure."

But, the

report casts doubt on whether this is a sustainable model moving forward.

In order to

ensure funding stormwater infrastructure is "fair and equitable" for both property owners and the municipality, "better options take several factors into consideration, including geography.

The

consultants, she said, suggest a "Development Intensity" model of funding as a fairer option.

"It is a

tiered rate system based on the type of property (runoff level) and property size," she said, noting that, if implemented, Aurora properties would be divided into three runoff groups "low, medium and high" with industrial and commercial developments being at the top of the scale. "With this model, a small business would not be charged as much as a large business because of the size of the property. Equally, measuring every property is not required because of the average imperviousness of the runoff level group is used to calculate the charge. This model balances simplicity and fairness since properties are charged what they should be charged, yet it is not overly costly to administer.

"However, this model is significantly more complex to create and maintain than the (current) tiered flat rate."

While the adoption and implementation of this new funding model will be contingent on a future study, the study itself received the formal green light at the most recent meeting of Council.

Speaking to both this study and a related motion from Councillor Wendy Gaertner, Councillor Michael Thompson stressed the cost of maintaining the system as-is, and said there needs to be a buy-in from all levels of government.

"The Environmental Commissioner of Ontario put out a report [that said] stormwater infrastructure deficit in Ontario alone is \$6.8 billion and there are a number of reports and studies out there that talk about the various municipalities," he said. "We cannot do it alone. You need the help of both the Federal and Provincial government to address the infrastructure deficit. AMO (Association of Municipalities of Ontario) has been talking about it for years, so I just think there is a broader conversation. We can talk about levies and everything else to try and address some of those issues, but it will not be enough, no different from just a general infrastructure deficit in Ontario alone. There are bigger strategies that need to be talked about.

"Everyone in every municipality recognizes that financially they do not have the resources to do it alone, that infrastructure deficit needs to be tackled and we need to continue to advocate both provincially and federally to help us. At the end of the day, and we have talked about this many, many, many times, that of every tax dollar, municipalities only get nine cents of that dollar. The rest goes to the Provincial and Federal, yet we own 60 per cent of the assets in Ontario. We cannot replace the actual values. It is a serious concern."