

Council calls for action amid global 'escalation' of terrorism and unrest

Council has called for action amid a global 'escalation' of terrorism and unrest around the world, which has spurred 'inciteful' actions within our own borders.

Before the holiday, Aurora lawmakers unanimously approved a motion from Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland acknowledging 'residents in the community have expressed feelings of uncertainty and safety concerns' due to the situation while also condemning 'all acts of terror and violence resulting in loss of life and injury.'

The motion also calls on the Town to press all levels of government to make the same acknowledgement and 'look to strengthening their available tools to deny inciteful speech that encourages violent extremists the ability to publicly manipulate, advocate, and incite violence or physical harm to another human being, whether it be online or in person.'

Further, the motion 'encourages' members of the community, including 'diverse local leaders' to promote peace, healing, and understanding during this difficult time.'

'Inciteful speech is knowingly being utilized to create division, manipulation and spread misinformation, which could be defined as violent extremist propaganda and encouraging violent crimes,' said Councillor Gilliland in the motion. 'Any loss of innocent civilian life is unacceptable and tragic; and other local municipal Councils and residents in Aurora have expressed concerns of uncertainty and safety who are asking for peace, protection and security.'

Speaking to her motion from her seat at the Council table, Councillor Gilliland said 'unrest around the world has triggered some homeland rallies and advocacy that support a lot of inciteful actions.'

'It has been causing a lot of uncertainty in our Town and safety concerns,' she said. 'I know I have been reached out [to] by residents personally expressing concerns of the unsafety and asking for peace and protection. I know there is a lot that is out of our hands as a municipality but what this motion does call on the governments to strengthen their available tools to deny some of this inciteful speech that has been encouraging some violent behaviour.'

'Most importantly, I think, what we ultimately need to encourage the community and our local leaders of faith to bring the community together and promote peace and healing and understanding at this difficult time. We're in the holiday season right now and there is nothing worse than feeling anxiety and stress and unsafe at this time. I think it is really important as leaders that we acknowledge and reach out to our residents that they are feeling this way and we are listening and we do hear what you're saying. We are calling for the community to come together and set examples of peace and promote that healing accordingly.'

Before the unanimous vote in favour of calls to action, Ward 5 Councillor John Gallo asked for clarity on some of the action items, noting he will ultimately support. Among his questions was how Aurora, as a municipality, would call on local faith leaders to 'promote peace, healing and understanding,' particularly whether it would be considered a direction to staff for them to rally.

'It is a message for us within the community that this is what we agree' that we are sending a message to the community and when we do have conversations with our faith leaders that we are promoting peace and healing and understanding,' responded Councillor Gilliland. 'It is really just a confirmation of what we're trying to promote to the community and if we're consistent and we all agree, that is what I am asking us to do.'

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter