

Council explores feasibility of Digital Data Charter

Aurora will soon explore the feasibility of developing a Digital Data charter that would protect residents' privacy in an increasingly digital world.

Sitting at Council's inaugural Committee of the Whole meeting, Council approved a motion from Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland tasking staff to come back with a report on just such a framework centred on human rights and privacy-enhancing technologies to ensure the ethical and responsible collection, management and use of data focusing on privacy rights, transparency and consent.

A motion that has been long in the works, Councillor Gilliland said the motion was inspired by the Federal Government's Smart Cities Challenge in 2017 and the rapidly changing world of technology.

Obviously we are being introduced to a lot of different technologies and, with that, there is also a lot of concerns [about] data, data privacy, and the consent around that, said Councillor Gilliland at the table. It's one thing to have a data privacy policy, but it is another when you're talking about the usage of that data and how third parties may use that data.

A charter, she added, would give municipalities like Aurora a guide on how civic bodies use the information collected and how the public can be protected.

Essentially, it is to ensure the ethical and responsible collection, management and use of data in the urban space, she continued. As we ebb, flow and change, we have Town Square and there is going to be some new technologies that are going to be introduced [and] some other infrastructure, it is very mindful to us to ensure that we have some sort of governance around that.

The principal focus is protecting human rights in a digital era and also promoting the general interest of the common good in the community and building a brighter future together through data. I do believe there are a lot of pros to this and it really does outline some accountability to how data is used.

While there was broad support around the Council table to get the ball rolling on this, lawmakers had a number of technical questions as to how this might be born to fruition.

A second clause within the motion, one which was ultimately tabled until next week's Council meeting, included direction to staff to report back to Council prior to investing, installing, or integrating technology that collects or retains personal data including images, recordings and third-party stakeholders.

The inclusion of third-party stakeholders was a point of clarification for Ward 4 Councillor Michael Thompson and Ward 5 Councillor John Gallo, and Councillor Thompson also said he would like more information on the Federal Government's move towards a Digital Charter Implementation Act.

There might be some value in exploring what they are doing as well [as what's going on in other municipalities] for when the staff report comes back, he said, before moving on to the third-party clause. The way this reads to me is that before staff can implement a change in process, that maybe they go to an online billing system, they have to report back to Council for direction on whether or not to move forward with that technology to install it, to utilize it. If that's the intent, I am not comfortable at this point in time. I would rather get staff to weigh in on how they perceived this second clause and whether or not it could be construed as limiting or curtailing their ability to implement some of the initiatives they have identified through their own business process.

Councillor Gilliland gave an example of what she said she meant: the installation of new lights that have the ability to sense human activity that could go far beyond the Town's use.

?I want to know about this new technology if this is something we want to do,? she said. ?I am not trying to put a hold on a billing system or anything?we already have in place. I am really looking at something brand-new people might be concerned about, say facial recognition. People want to ensure that they have consent and there is privacy around that.?

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