

INSIDE AURORA: 1,700,000 Options

By Scott Johnston

Council has decided it is only going to support two of the three proposed pedestrian underpasses under Leslie Street when that road is reconstructed shortly.

Part of the reasoning is along the lines of 'we can find a better way to spend that money.'

When I hear that sort of thing, I'm of two minds. On one hand, I'm thinking 'that's what we want to see' really think this through and put that funding to better use.'

On the other hand I'm thinking 'are we sure that's going to happen?'

It may be a bit cynical to feel this way, but we've seen how our tax dollars sometimes get spent in Aurora.

Let's see, there was over \$1M spent on lawyers as current and former members of Council sued citizens and each other over a series of perceived slights over the past several years. Whether these slights were real or imagined has been up to the courts, and our tax dollars, to decide.

And I don't think that's all over yet.

Then there have been the endless consultants who have provided studies in Town that have not really resulted in any tangible results: Yonge Street redevelopment, heritage spaces, Library Square. In fact, I think some of the studies have been studies of previous studies.

It goes back a few years, but there was the classic case of speed reduction devices being installed in the northeast quadrant at considerable cost (following a series of studies, of course), and then later removed (after more studies) at further cost.

Around the same time, and while probably not as great a budget impact, there must have been some dollars required for signs, letterhead and other updates, as Council shifted back and forth over the naming of John West Way/Municipal Drive/John West Way. While it is understandable that some projects will incur cost overruns, certainly the ballooning budget of the recent renovations/expansion of the Leisure Centre necessitated some tax dollars.

Just up the street the original \$15M budget for the new Joint Operations Centre has nearly doubled. It got to the point where to keep costs down they were required to spend more money to hire someone whose job it was to keep the Town from spending more money.

Another questionable proposed expense much in the news recently is the cost to install the military vehicle in the Peace Park.

It's not that many of these projects aren't well-intentioned, they're maybe just not thought through enough.

Fortunately, despite the above and other examples, most of the time in Aurora we do achieve value from our tax dollars. But there are enough cases where we don't seem to have gotten the best bang from our bucks to give one pause.

As for the \$1.7M we're saving on the Leslie Street underpass, I'd hate to see that after much discussion, debate, consultation and review of all the options of how to better reallocate these funds, the final decision is to...spend it on that third Leslie Street underpass.

Because by that time, regional work on that road will be far enough along that the delay in implementing the underpass project will have increased the cost to \$3M.

But on the plus side, if the \$3M price tag results in the decision to once again hold off on this project, just think how much more money we'll save.

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