

## New fire hall at Bayview and St. John's at least two years away

**By Brock Weir**

A new fire station on Earl Stewart Drive near the southwest corner of St. John's Sideroad and Bayview Avenue to serve both Aurora and Newmarket is roughly two years away from becoming a reality.

This was the update provided to Council by Ian Laing, Chief of the Central York Fire Services (CYFS), last week.

In his annual report to Council on the CYFS, the fire department which jointly serves ? and is jointly funded and governed by ? both communities, Chief Laing emphasized the need for a station near the centre of the two municipalities to enhance response times in all four corners of the CYFS area.

?By putting the fifth fire station in the centre of the community, you will see the primary response time reduced in that central area, which is your St. John's corridor up and down Bayview,? said Chief Laing, responding to questions from Councillor Tom Mrakas on the impact the new addition will have on service. ?Your first truck response time should [be] reduced and it will also reduce the three-truck response because you can respond to back up the four corners of the two communities quicker from the centre than from one of the other corners.?

A fifth fire station from the CYFS ? and the third operational station to be built in Aurora ? has been debated and considered for years both by the Councils of Newmarket and Aurora, as well as their Joint Council Committee, which is the CYFS' governing body comprised of members of both Town Halls.

Land has been secured in the Earl Stewart Drive area near the new Sterne Acura dealership after additional sites were examined, including a suggestion of the northwest corner of Yonge Street and St. John's Sideroad initially floated by the CYFS.

?The fire station, from a fire chief's point of view, is like planting a tree,? said Chief Laing, responding to Councillor Wendy Gaertner's question of when the public can expect the new station to be operational. ?The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago, but the next best time is today. I know from my past experience it takes two years to design and build a facility.

?We have a piece of property. It is located in a spot that is really going to help us. Now we are in the process of seeing where we are at.?

Part of that process, he added, is feeling out where things currently stand with the Richmond Hill Fire Service. Recent discussions around the Joint Council Committee have touched upon whether the next natural step for the CYFS is to continue the spread southward to have one fire service for the three municipalities.

?Central York is a success story,? said Chief Laing. ?We are going to begin talks with the Richmond Hill Fire Service to see if there is any merit in consolidating with that department, as well as to see if we can provide a higher level of service to the communities. We want to avoid any duplication [in service]. I tend to look at our training division, which has to relocate to the new facility, would be enhancing the training that was going to be going on in Richmond Hill.

?Currently, we rent time from them to use their facility and they rent time from us to use our facilities, but they are not duplicates of each other; we do different things. They come up and they pay us to rent our facility and we send our crews down there to do live fire training. Everything else we do from here now.?

According to Chief Lang, emergency response is the third line of defence when it comes to the mandate of CYFS. The first step is public education on fire prevention, the second is fire prevention, fire safety standards and code enforcement, and the third, when those critical first two steps don't work, is emergency response.

?In the line of fire prevention and public education, we have developed a program called Stay Fire Smart. Last year, just under 9,000

homes were visited. That means in just under three years we have developed this program, we have covered over 26,000 homes. This is a five year program and at the end of five years, we will have completed the 42,000 residences in the communities. We'll start again because people move and neighbourhoods grow.?

These programs, he added, help ?our most vulnerable,? but there are still situations that need to be addressed. There are currently 19 ?vulnerable occupancies? in Aurora and Newmarket which are typically nursing and retirement homes. 16 of the 19 have sprinkler systems, which is now in the fire code, but three do not.

These three, he noted, are all in Aurora and while two will be compliant ?shortly?, the third will not be brought up to standard until 2025.