

Project manager set to oversee completion of Joint Operations Centre

By Brock Weir

A project manager is set to come on board to oversee the completion of Aurora's Joint Operations Centre.

Council approved the new part-time hire, which will take up \$75,400 of the project's already approved contingency fund, at the Committee level last week.

Since the inception of the Joint Operations Centre, a new facility which will bring together Aurora's Parks and Recreation Department as well as Department of Public Works under one roof, the project has been overseen by Ilmar Simanovskis, Aurora's Director of Infrastructure, and that department's facilities manager. The growing scope of the work, however, along with their regular departmental work, was becoming too much to handle, he said.

'We decided that a year ago it was based on workload and the state of where we were a year ago,' said Mr. Simanovskis. 'It is becoming very challenging to keep a close eye on both projects, quite frankly. By bringing this person in we both feel the experience and the additional oversight on the project will result in some savings.'

While Council supported bringing on a Project Manager overall, some questioned why this was coming forward now, a year after the project was approved.

'I truly want to understand why we wouldn't have identified that six or nine months ago saying this is going to put a strain on the department,' said Councillor Michael Thompson.

Since then, however, Mr. Simanovskis' responsibilities have increased as Council eyes the implementation of the Clear Bag garbage program and turning Aurora's streetlights over into an LED system.

'I am very supportive of this function taking place,' said Aurora CAO Neil Garbe. 'It is my assessment that we need eyes continuously on this project. 20 hours a week on site is really important to this project. This is a contractor who is really aggressive, who pushes very aggressively and we have to make sure we have people on site who can facilitate decision-making and are looking out for our best interests on the site.'

'This Council is determined to move the legislative yard sticks, and we need Mr. Simanovskis behind his desk, pushing this forward like road widenings, traffic studies, and so on. This is part of how we manage that resource [and] I think it is a critical position.'

Supporting the proposal for a manager, Councillor Wendy Gaertner indicated a degree of surprise this project has been moving along without one.

'My experience is the director never asks for extra help unless he really needs it,' she said. 'It is a multi-million dollar project and we don't want to mess things up.'

Added Mayor Geoff Dawe: 'In my experience, project management is like that old blues song 'You Don't Miss Your Water Till The Well Runs Dry.' You don't really know what you've missed with a project manager until the project is finished and you realise things could have been managed better. I think this is the way to go. It is difficult to tell whether or not ideally he will save his salary. We won't know that until the need of the project. We won't know until we get close to the end of the project whether we should have had one. This is a step we should be taking.'

Others, however, were more muted in their enthusiasm, including Councillor Harold Kim, who said he didn't like the idea of bringing in a project manager 'mid-stream' in principle but was encouraged by the level of experience in the individual. With the Project Manager's salary coming in at one third of one per cent of the project's overall budget, Councillor Paul Pirri said he was 'tempted' to believe they would prove their own value to the project, but that would be difficult to quantify.

Councillor Tom Mrakas, however, spoke against the recommendation.

?I can think of an easy way to save on contingency ? we can save \$75,000 by not accepting this position,? he said. ?We have the Leisure Complex? we didn't hire a project manager. I think staff can take care of the way it is. I just do not see the need for it. I do not see how having an extra chef in the kitchen is going to help. Personally, I think it will just be too many people making suggestions and it will get mixed up. It is easier if we just let staff do the job. They are the ones who have the final say.?