

Report will look at municipal benefits to cannabis sales

An upcoming report from municipal staff will look at benefits cannabis stores have brought to Aurora.

In 2019, the Town of Aurora voted to opt in on retail cannabis sales in the community, the only York Region municipality to do so alongside Whitchurch-Stouffville. Since then, stores have flourished and last fall Councillor John Gallo called for a report on the impact of these retail sales.

In his motion, the Councillor, who now represents Ward 5 in the current term of Council, called for a Council report at staff's earliest convenience on the number of cannabis stores in Aurora, a full financial accounting of what the Town received directly or indirectly as a result of opting in; and all correspondence issued by staff to the AGCO (Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario) after receiving notice of a new cannabis retail store.

On November 20, 2018, the Ministry of Finance confirmed in a letter to the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) that the Provincial government will provide \$40 million over two years through the Ontario Cannabis Legalization Implementation Fund.

This, he said, included \$15 million to be distributed amongst all opt-in communities like Aurora on a per-household basis with each municipality receiving at least \$5,000 to support towns and cities with the implementation costs relating to the legalization of cannabis.

More, he added, was expected in subsequent phases.

As the motion was approved by Council at the end of the last term, Councillor Gallo sought a status update on the report last week.

Director of Planning Marco Ramunno said the report would be coming to Council as soon as possible.

At the time of the motion's passage, support was offered around the table with Councillor Michael Thompson stating there was value in bringing it forward.

In terms of the financial report, the fund that we received money from is there as well, said Councillor Thompson last September. It is \$78,000 to date, but I don't know if it is the full amount directly or indirectly, so I think the report, staff, would be good to further clarify any additional moneys we receive.

I know that in discussions we had in the bylaw that we passed, we added additional criteria that we wanted the AGCO (Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario) to consider when evaluating these applications above just the legislative requirement of 150 metres to a school. To the best of my knowledge the AGCO has not considered any of those additional requirements that we put in but I think it would be good to have those letters as a matter of public record so we can have those conversations with the residents and say we're trying our best but the AGCO isn't necessarily listening to our concerns.

Councillor Gallo added he was looking for information from staff on individual applications for new stores to the AGCO be made public so Council's position on whether or not each application meets the criteria is clear to residents.

I am looking for those basically so we can publicly say, We were against some of them because it didn't fit the criteria and they went ahead anyway, said Councillor Gallo. I think that's important knowledge the public should have that we did our job, that we communicated. That level of detail is more than enough.

By Brock Weir
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