

Safe Restart funding will help Aurora navigate COVID realities in 2021

Nearly \$2 million from the Province's Safe Restart program will help Aurora navigate uncertain waters as the global pandemic nears its second year.

Last year, the Provincial Government granted Aurora approximately \$1.8 million as part of the Safe Restart program, but efficiencies found at Town Hall resulted in this money being left untouched in 2020 and ready to roll out this year.

"All municipal programs are currently operating within budget, despite the impacts of COVID-19," CAO Doug Nadorozny told local lawmakers at a Special Council Meeting held last week to discuss the ongoing impacts of both the virus and the Province-wide shutdown and stay-at-home orders implemented to combat it. "We will have a full financial impact report with our June forecast. The 2020 impacts were mitigated within the Operating Budget, which means we still have the Safe Restart funding at our disposal in excess of \$1.8 million and those funds can be used to cover losses of revenue or extraordinary expenses that are related to COVID. We still have significant resources to deal with whatever is coming our way."

Since the most recent Provincial orders were put in place earlier this month, the Town has not had to make changes on the staffing side, other than requiring all staff who can work from home continue to do so or, in some cases, resume doing so.

"We had some staff come in because it was easier for them to do their job in the office or to visit more frequently," said Mr. Nadorozny. "We have cut that back to the absolute minimum to respect the Order and hopefully having people travel as little as possible. All staff are required to work from home if it is at all possible."

Since the start of the pandemic, 248 staff have been impacted by layoffs, he noted. 205 staff members are now on "infectious disease emergency leave" which allows staff on leave to maintain their current employment status and seniority.

"It is a tool we have to respond more rapidly to the changing needs that we have, in particular to bring those people back should we need them," said Mr. Nadorozny. "We have 22 that will probably go on the Infectious Disease Emergency Leave in January or February and that is the result of some facility closures. All that said, we are continually reviewing our redeployment needs and the possibilities to support other parts of the organization. As things change and we stay in a lockdown, we anticipate there will be some movement of some of our staff to help in areas where we can use a little extra support."

"Throughout the pandemic, we have always been working to balance the health and safety with quality of life for our residents and employees. I am proud to say we have managed to maintain the vast majority of municipal services under the pandemic and it has led to quite a bit of innovation and new ways of doing business. In another time, when this is all past us, it will be my pleasure to review some of the outstanding work that has gone on by our employees to bend to the situation and to continue to offer as many services as we possibly can under very tight constraints."

"We are one of the only municipalities that has maintained our very high level of special events programming and, of course, we all know that is due in large part to the innovation and creativity and diligence of (Special Events Coordinator) Shelley Ware, but there are many others who have supported her as well, and in our organization, to bend with the new rules and to ensure we can provide some measure of special events for our residents."

By Brock Weir
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