

\$2.2 million price tag turns the page on JOC

By Brock Weir

Funding to finally complete Aurora's Joint Operations Centre is set to receive Council approval this week.

A total of \$2,185,200 worth of capital works, funded by reserves and development charges so it doesn't result in a direct hit to taxpayers, will be required to finish the job on a project Councillors described as the 'close of a chapter.'

The final tally was presented at last Tuesday's General Committee meeting by Al Downey, Aurora's Director of Operations. Mr. Downey's report signalled the final step in the full audit over the Joint Operation Centre's (JOC) construction, which was requested by Council last year.

The initial audit, as reported earlier this spring by The Auroran, criticized the build for its 'poor management' in a number of areas, stemming from its lack of a specifically-tasked project manager until the JOC was well underway.

It also outlined a number of essential components of the JOC that were removed from the build's original scope so it appeared to be within budget. These elements were then brought back to Council for further approval as extra add-on items.

Mr. Downey's report 'and recommendations' follow a Council decision which tasked staff with bringing forward all the items, previously approved conditionally at budget time, that are required to complete the JOC.

Among the items still needed to be completed out of the contract were back lot paving to the tune of \$890,200, completion of the upper parking lot and rear yard for \$285,000, landscaping for \$85,000, a garbage tipping station for \$100,000, \$60,000 for exterior signage, and \$45,000 for furniture.

New items 'encompassing those cut from the original design' include \$300,000 for storage buildings, \$50,000 for automated gate control, \$50,000 for south side exterior finishing, \$300,000 to complete the shell space on the third floor, and \$20,000 for an intercom system.

In addition to these items, approvals from the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority (LSRCA) are still outstanding.

'Permits for the JOC were obtained from the LSRCA to commence work on the site,' said Mr. Downey. 'During the construction process, fill was placed into the valley without the approval of the LSRCA. Staff from the LSRCA have attended the site and inspected the results of the fill operations. The site remains stable and erosion protection has been installed; however, ground cover and landscaping to stabilize the slopes is required.'

'Staff have been in communication with the LSRCA and are awaiting either approval of the works or direction regarding what remedial actions are required to obtain approval. Staff have not included any cost estimates for remedial works as they are unknown at this time. If capital funding is required, staff will prepare a separate report to Council requesting such funding.'

While this approval remains a missing piece of the puzzle, Council members expressed some relief that they are close to turning the page on this project, which has been dogged by controversy from the start.

'I am really relieved to have this chapter of the JOC, at least in my mind, to be closed and everything that needed to be in the JOC has been budgeted, accounted for, and all of the requirements for staff are in there,' said Councillor Harold Kim. 'Again, it was necessary that it was overbudget, but things that should have been included were not included. I am just happy this chapter is over and the JOC will finally be how it should have been at the very beginning.'

A similar sentiment was offered by Councillor John Abel.

'I am along the lines of Councillor Kim that we're finally closing the loose ends on this project,' he said. 'It was controversial from the beginning, but one of the main things that was borne out was there was no project management methodology in place, and that came from the auditor and that was his comment. We will take that as something we learned from that. As we said at the conclusion of that audit, this is something we will use further for any projects that we are undertaking.'

While Councillor Wendy Gaertner said she had an issue with the project being completed from Development Charges earmarked for Parks & Facilities as well as Roads & Related, money set aside for indoor recreation and roads, she said should not be used in this project, she argued.

Town Treasurer Dan Elliott, on the other hand, said that portions of this project funding will be used for equipment and other items related to parks and roads maintenance.

Another sticking point was the building out of the JOC's third floor shell space.

This shell space was intended as a cost-effective way to have space ready once other administration spaces become overcrowded, eyed as potential future office space that could be used for storage in the meantime.

This build-out, however, is coming sooner than Council anticipated.

?We haven't determined which department [will be moving into the space],? said CAO Doug Nadorozny, responding to questions from Councillor Michael Thompson. ?We're actually at the ELT (Executive Leadership Team) table having that discussion right now on the best way to proceed. The idea is to relocate one department there which would create swing space in this building because we are at capacity. As you can see in the lobby and the second floor [at Town Hall] we're pushing out cubicles and so on to accommodate the staff we have. We will decide which group should be in there and move one group over to the JOC facility and come back to Council with a plan for this building.?

Councillor Thompson, in turn, expressed some misgivings.

?It is something that has been in front of Council since I have been on Council, in 2011, so I think that it would help us to stay in the loop,? he said. ?I would appreciate you coming back because I have had multiple conversations when it comes to Town Hall space needs. It was one of the ideas on why the third floor was put forward for the JOC as well, but just to be part of the conversation would be great.?