

Ad Hoc Committee provides research on compensation for local Councillors

Council compensation research findings will be presented to lawmakers this fall, which shows the challenges of working as a municipal leader.

The findings suggest that a change in compensation may be due for members of Aurora Council.

The research included data points from eighteen local government organizations across the Greater Toronto Area that are 'lower tier' and with a population between 35,000 to over 338,000.

The data includes population, density, ratio of constituents to each member of Council, operating and capital budgets, base wages for the role of Mayor and Councillor as well as review of trends in the areas of benefits and pensions.

In addition, the research incorporated feedback from Aurora's Council members who were offered the opportunity, by way of a survey, to provide their own perspective on the complexities and demands of their role.

One Council member said the most significant challenges pertain to the delicate balance between the diverse interests of the community, managing the Town's budget with limited resources, and navigating policies and regulations to make informed decisions for complex matters such as affordable housing and environmental sustainability.

'One of the most significant challenges I face as a Councillor is finding a delicate balance between the diverse interests of our community,' the anonymous survey respondent said. 'Aurora is home to residents from different backgrounds, each with their own set of needs and priorities. As a representative, it is my responsibility to consider and address these interests while making decisions that benefit the community as a whole. Achieving consensus can be difficult, but it is crucial to ensure fair and equitable outcomes.'

Another respondent said that navigating the political dynamics and building effective working relationships with fellow Councillors could be challenging along with the significant time commitment.

'Balancing personal values with the broader interests of the community requires tact and diplomacy. Constructive dialogue, compromise, and finding common ground are vital to achieving positive outcomes,' they said.

'Attending Council meetings, committee sessions, community events, and responding to constituent inquiries require substantial time and effort. Balancing these responsibilities with personal and professional commitments can be challenging. Effectively managing my schedule and priorities is crucial to fulfilling my duties as a councillor while maintaining a balanced life.'

The respondent voiced that Aurora Council compensation has been either very conservative or stagnant for many years and believes that it needs a correction because of the reduction in Council members in 2018, along with impacts from freeze and inflation.

'In my opinion, the public would want smart quality candidates who are compensated in a means that matches the overall talent, expectations, qualifications and role. We must also consider the Province looking at governance. Aside from all said, I hope you are

able to achieve comparables from other Towns,? they said.

Overall, the survey received four responses with a variety of experience in terms of total years on Council.

To summarize survey results, the research showed that pay for both the role of Mayor and Councillor is below 50th percentile or median.

There is some interest from Members of Council to qualify for participation in a pension plan.

Data shows that about 1 in 2 municipalities between 50-99k in population provide this.

There seems minimal interest in participation in a group benefits plan (health and dental coverage). Same here on the benefits. 1 in 2 municipalities with a population between 50-99k provide group health benefits.

Severance provision of the by-law currently applies only to the Mayor position. Those municipalities in York Region that have a severance by-law enacted apply it to all members of Council.

Members of Council said they spend a range from five to 15 hours per week preparing for General Committee or Council meetings and about two hours per week attending public events outside the normal Council related cycle.

As for next steps, the Council Compensation Ad Hoc Committee for the Town of Aurora will develop recommendations for Council's consideration and staff will prepare a report to Council for an October 2023 General Committee meeting.

By Elisa Nguyen