

Anti-idling policy revved up by Council

Aurora is set to take the next steps towards firm bylaws targeting idling vehicles.

Councillors, sitting at the Committee level last week, gave their tentative approval on the establishment of new anti-idling policies within the Town, the first steps towards a stand-alone bylaw that could ultimately get tougher on drivers who leave their vehicles running for more than a couple of minutes at a time.

Should the new policies receive final approval by Council at the end of this month, the anti-idling measures will place limits on vehicle idling times, spur an education campaign, and introduce a mechanism that will eventually lead to enforcement.

The development of the anti-idling policy is based on two existing Town bylaws limiting unnecessary vehicle idling, said Natalie Kehle, Energy and Climate Change Analyst for the Town of Aurora. Aurora has two existing bylaws that limit vehicle idling: The Noise Bylaw and the Park Bylaw. Since the Noise Bylaw is the more extensive of the two in terms of limitations and exemptions, the Policy follows the Noise Bylaw [and mirrors] the general provisions, which limits vehicle idling to five minutes. Two exemptions are when idling is essential to the basic function of the vehicle or equipment it is running, or due to weather conditions.

Non-compliance of the Anti-Idling Policy may lead to penalties, if found to be in violation of the Noise Bylaw, at the discretion of the Town's Bylaw Officer.

But the majority of York Region municipalities limit vehicle idling to two to three minutes, a discrepancy which was a sticking point for Council last Tuesday. But, according to staff, this narrower idling window is the result of these communities having standalone anti-idling bylaws on the books.

Currently, we're being presented this anti-idling policy at five minutes, but it does state in this report that the majority of the surrounding municipalities idle for two to three minutes, which is the policy, and I think it would make sense to be a little bit more consistent and reduce that idling to two to three minutes as the report says, said Councillor Rachel Gilliland. I think if we could start at the two to three minutes and then have a review after two years, I think that would be something that I would like to see and hopefully the rest of my Council members will agree.

The rest of Council, however, had mixed views on the best way to move forward.

Following a request from Councillor Michael Thompson to elaborate on the discrepancy between what is proposed for Aurora and what is already being carried out elsewhere, Town Planner David Waters said the recommendations are to align anti-idling with the provisions of the Noise Bylaw, which gives bylaw officers enforcement ability.

It will be difficult to have these two different numbers out there, so our recommendation was to go with the five-minute limit on anti-idling, said Mr. Waters. If we keep it at five minutes, it allows us to then apply the Noise Bylaw and enforce it.

Councillor Thompson then asked whether it would be possible to revisit the policy in two years with an eye to adjusting the time limits with the two existing bylaws, and any future anti-idling bylaws, together on the table.

I am in agreement with Councillor Thompson and from our past experience it does take up to a year, perhaps longer, to get a final bylaw realized, said Councillor Harold Kim. I think inherently I would like to have something now, but, in reality, just like having transparent garbage bags, that motion that came last term, there has to be an education process and we have to feel this out with our residents. So, why not take a year or two?

Whether it is a year, whether it is two years, I am indifferent and putting a bylaw in place immediately would be a source of consternation for most residents, I think.

Councillor John Gallo offered a similar perspective: ?I would prefer we move into it (a bylaw) right away, but I would agree that doing so does take some time and the transmission timeframe, if ultimately the intent is to mitigate the exhaust that is going into the environment, it should be moved as quickly as we can. I can't stand it when I see it happen, I am sure we're all on the same page, and I am all for giving staff the teeth to enforce it. As quickly as we can do it I think it should be done.?

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter