

Armoury, Safe Restart factor into Budget talks

The Town of Aurora's lease with Niagara College's Canadian Food & Wine Institute (CFWI) for the historic Aurora Armoury will be up for Council review in the coming weeks in light of COVID-19.

During the start of deliberations over Aurora's 2022 Budget last week, municipal CAO Doug Nadorozny told Council that some revisions have been proposed to the lease as a result of COVID and it would be up for Council's review shortly in a closed session meeting.

COVID hit eight days into the official start, said Mr. Nadorozny on when the CFWI aimed to formally launch its programs last year. Given the delays in finishing the Armoury project, getting their liquor license and so on, I think it was seven or eight days before they were shut down completely. It comes down to interpretation of the lease because in the early stages of the lease there weren't to be many payments made. It was an escalating lease over time. The question is when does the lease start, and that is exactly what we're going to bring to Council.

Financial impacts on this file are among the many that will be covered through Safe Restart funding that came into Aurora from the Federal and Provincial governments.

According to Rachel Wainwright-van Kessel, Aurora's Treasurer and Director of Finance, \$812,000 in Safe Restart funding will be part of the Town's overall Operating Budget in the year ahead.

Their (The Armoury's) business was impacted by COVID and as a lessee they were supported by the Safe Restart funding, said Robin McDougall, Aurora's Director of Community Services.

The Armoury was one of several Town-owned properties leased out to others that were up for discussion at the inaugural Budget meeting of the year, which was held in Council Chambers on November 8.

This had an impact on the Corporate Services budget by \$469,000, said Ms. McDougall.

COVID has had a significant impact on the bottom line of Corporate Services, a department which includes recreational facilities like the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex and the Aurora Community Centre. It is anticipated, she said, that COVID will continue to have a financial impact in the year ahead, but as more programs continue opening up, there will be more revenue coming in.

Fortunately, with the offset of the Safe Restart funds [to mitigate those] hits, it has balanced us a little bit better, thankfully, she said. [In 2021] we had our Sports Dome come online with utilities and some minor variances in our expenditures and revenues. Some of the COVID impacts that resulted in \$430,000 in extra costs due either to decreased revenues or increased costs for cleaning, we have had an opportunity to manage that net revenue loss in our programs and events and they were impacted by a reduced capacity to meet the physical distancing needs and we didn't have the same number of people in our programs.

With some of our contract (positions) in our centres, we had to increase contracts for maintaining those rules and requirements, and regulations for cleaning, as an example, and we saw some reduced revenues in some of the room bookings we didn't have room bookings for a while.

On the other side of the coin, however, there was an increase in our productivity for some programs, such as the Aurora Seniors' Centre Without Walls program, which pivoted some of the Centre's in-person programming to online or telephone channels.

It was definitely a program that was well-attended and participated in throughout COVID times and I anticipate it is going to continue on beyond COVID as it has become such a popular [program], she said.

?With the latest in changes to the pandemic response with increased capacities back to lifting those restrictions at our centres, with the interest coming back into our centres, they are lovely, lively and full, but we are still obligated to maintain all screening and observing all proof of vaccinations with every single [patron] that comes through our door. We need to make sure that is done and well-recorded. Ultimately, we have added to manage that at the gate of each of our rec centres; we have enhanced hiring on a temporary basis security staff and this is common throughout York Region just to manage this support and it certainly provides an element of presence with security in there. Into 2022? we anticipate we can pull back if things start to ease off with restrictions.?

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