

Aurora adopts Blue Dot environmental movement

By Brock Weir

Aurora has joined a growing list of Canadian municipalities to adopt David Suzuki's Blue Dot movement.

Council adopted the resolution last week, which recognizes "all people have the right to" breathe clean air, drink clean water, consume safe, food, access nature, know about pollutants and contaminants released into the local environment, and to participate in decision-making that will affect the environment."

Through Council's resolution, the sentiments will be formalized in a call to the Province for a formal review of the Ontario Environmental Bill of Rights, as well as to the Federal government to develop legislation enshrining the rights of everyone to live in a healthy environment.

"It is important to us to look to the future," said Councillor Tom Mrakas, who brought forward the original motion to Council. "I think it starts with the small steps and moving into bigger steps. This is a good first step to take for Aurora to do something positive for the environment."

With Council's endorsement came the view it was important to put action behind the words or, at the end of the day, "put our money with our mouth is", supporting the view that the principals in the motion would help guide a reworked Corporate Environmental Action Plan at Town Hall.

Some Council members, however, said they had some reservations on what adopting the resolution would actually mean in terms of advocating for a Bill of Rights and which tenets of the plan, if any, would be legally binding on a municipality like Aurora.

"I think it is impossible to be against this motion because it is very feel-good and we want our children, grandchildren and subsequent generations to inherit a better world, a cleaner environment, and the like," said Councillor Jeff Thom. "The motion asks something very specific that the Town not only support the Blue Dot campaign, but it also enacts, essentially, a Bill of Rights."

A similar view was offered by Mayor Geoff Dawe who said while he supported the motion, there needs to be a degree of caution as the principals can spill over into other municipal matters, including density, to which the municipality is not the sole driver.

"We have to be very careful in how we look at bringing these forward," said Mayor Dawe. "In some respects, it is motherhood and apple pie; who wouldn't be in favour of clean air, clean water, safe food, and the right to access nature? We just have to be very careful in how we put this together and make it work. I think it is a good motion and I will certainly support it [but] nothing is ever as easy as we like to think it is."

For resident David Heard, who was one of two residents to approach the podium to speak on the issue, it certainly is not. While the principles of the motion are great, he said this kind of environmental advocacy has not historically been the case in Aurora.

"In this very Town, I believe there have been some consequences at times for speaking up, especially with environmental issues," said Mr. Heard, noting a potential long-sitting dumping site in Aurora. "Are we to ignore our place in order to be politically safe and maybe not rock the boat? I ask, are we joining programs because it is possibly trendy? rather than to be transparent on the real issues at hand?"

"What we need to do is much larger. I feel what we need to do is begin a grassroots movement and maybe it needs to start in this community. This community has strength in people who are intelligent, passionate. We have serious concerns in the municipality that need to be addressed. If we are going to write letters to the Feds, I would suggest we start asking for some money for some environmental cleanups in our own backyard."