

Aurora approves measures addressing US Tariff threats

Council has unanimously passed a motion to amend its procurement by-law, with changes designed to respond to potential US tariffs and support Canadian suppliers in procurement processes.

The by-law amendment raises the thresholds for low-value and mid-value procurement bids, which do not require open competition, to account for inflation and ensure compliance with trade treaties. They further propose that Canadian suppliers be given preference over foreign ones in cases where foreign governments are not acting in "good faith," defined in the report as "honouring the terms of their trade treaty and not applying additional tariffs."

Mayor Tom Mrakas, who proposed the amendment at the January 14 Committee of the Whole meeting, strongly supported the proposed changes, emphasizing the importance of protecting local jobs and businesses.

"Preferring made-in-Canada products and suppliers is critical to supporting local businesses, protecting local jobs, and ensuring that Aurora remains economically resilient."

He further stated, "By working together we can ensure that our procurement practices support Canadian businesses, Canadian jobs, and a stronger economy for all. And I'm proud that once again, here in Aurora, we are one of the first municipalities to act and take the necessary steps to amend our procurement by-law."

Town Councillors similarly expressed support for the amendment but also recognized that it likely would not make a drastic change to procurement practices in Aurora, seeing as only 0.7% of Aurora's suppliers are from the US.

"I agree that this is the right thing to do," said Ward 3 Councillor Wendy Gaertner. "Will it make a difference to us? I doubt it. But it is a tangible show of support for what we are trying to accomplish at all levels of our government in Canada."

"While this is great and I'm happy we put it forward," said Ward 5 Councillor John Gallo, "[Looking at] the net impact to our community, I don't think our business is going to change very much as a result of this because we're already doing a very good job."

Gallo also raised some concerns over the urgency of this amendment as Staff had intended to perform a more comprehensive review of the by-law unrelated to the tariffs later this year.

"If this can wait, I'd prefer that, until the new by-law comes in with a more fulsome report on the rationale for updating these values."

Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese echoed his concerns, asking Town Director of Finance Rachel Wainwright-van Kessel, "If we were to approve this by-law now, and all the tariff information changed significantly, are we satisfied with this procurement by-law as it is? Are the changes that are being suggested in here desirable for us to have so that we don't need to come back every time someone makes a change in their tariff policy?"

Wainwright-van Kessel assured him that the proposed amendments are flexible enough that they could apply to any nation acting contrary to their trade treaties.

Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland expressed her support of the amendment, stating "I do like the fact that we have increased our thresholds within the recommendation here. Hopefully, we will be encouraging others to do the same."

Staff will review the by-law and provide a final version for Councillors to vote to enact at the Council meeting at the end of the month.

By Selena Loureiro