

Aurora establishes Anti-Racism, Anti-Black Racism task force

This past spring, more than 1,000 residents from across York Region filled Town Park as part of a Solidarity Walk against anti-Black racism around the world. Now, the Town is set to establish a new task force to address the problem at a local level.

Last week, Council unanimously approved a motion brought forward by Mayor Tom Mrakas and Councillor Harold Kim to establish an Anti-Black Racism and Anti-Racism Task Force to take "meaningful action" and help effect "long-term systemic change."

In their motion, they said the move builds upon Aurora's endorsement of York Region's Diversity and Inclusion Charter and the Town's commitment to "building a more inclusive society by "working to identify, address and prevent systemic racism in municipal policy, programs and services."

The purpose of the task force, they expanded, is to "develop strategies" to eliminate racism in the community and within "the Municipal Corporation" while working with "Black community groups within Aurora and York Region to identify and develop priorities" and "opportunities to increase Black community engagement and foster an increased public awareness of anti-Black racism."

"Last summer, there was another motion I put forward in terms of having staff investigate diversity in Aurora and the Town of Aurora with respect to employment and I believe that this is coming to us sometime in the fall," said Councillor Kim, who moved the motion alongside Councillor Sandra Humfries. "A lot of things have happened [since then]. It seems like every year there is some really, really bad incident that happens, whether it be in the States or in Canada " and lately the George Floyd incident. With that, the Mayor and I were talking about what we could do as a community and as a Town to not just merely have a discussion, but take action.

"I know we have had other actions before, but we want to take action " something solid and something measurable, hence the motion."

Councillor Humfries said she was "really proud" of the motion and, moving forward, it was a mark of leadership.

"We're actually taking action," she said. "We're not just stamping our approval on it?we're actually doing something."

Support was also expressed by Councillors Wendy Gaertner and Michael Thompson, with the latter stating he wanted to make sure people with lived experience have a place on the committee, which is set to be comprised of two Council members and seven members of the community.

"In the past, sometimes when we have had?more of a focused or specialized committee, we have gone out to the public and we have put some wording into the advertisements when we are seeking citizen members looking for specific experiences, skills or background that could complement or perhaps bring some knowledge and experience to the issues," said Councillor Thompson. "The way it reads, it is saying we're going to follow our standard process [but] will there be an attempt to put some language into those advertisements and try to encourage and seek out people who could add to this community with their knowledge, experience or background?"

Councillor Kim replied that you want people with that "lived experience" well-represented on the committee to "give us first-hand knowledge of their experience and their testimony."

"Only then can we have these types of solutions we need to alleviate some of the pain in our society," said Councillor Kim. "Certainly, we do need people with diverse views."

Mayor Mrakas added he would also like to look at these issues with a wider scope.

?I know we're striving to take action on a lot of these issues that are coming to the forefront,? he said. ?I commend you and this Council for what we're doing. I will be talking to Mayor Taylor because I know that Newmarket is looking to do something similar from a task force perspective?and I want to have a conversation with him possibly seeking if there is a way we can collaborate [as] I know this issue doesn't end at our borders.?

By Brock Weir