

?Aurora Speaks? web-based traffic solution gets greenlight

By Brock Weir

If you see a traffic problem in your neighbourhood and want the Town to do something about it, there will soon be an app for that. Council has approved ?Aurora Speaks? an ?innovative? web-based platform that will allow Aurorans to log on, drop a pin on a map and identify problem areas for neighbours and lawmakers alike to consider possible solutions.

Given the formal green light at Council on Tuesday night, it is intended to be a new spin on Aurora's old Traffic Safety Advisory Committee. While Council voted last year to bring the Committee back to help address and investigate numerous traffic complaints rolling into Town Hall, they welcomed this new approach to addressing old problems.

?I am really excited to see how this model comes to fruition,? said Councillor Sandra Humfries, one of the leading voices behind bringing the Committee back. ?I think once we have it rolling and we can get some timely feedback on how things are developing, having ourselves go into the site as well and see the information we're getting from residents?that is really when you get true statistics and true measurements to validate what you're doing and the actions we're taking to keep traffic flowing, appropriate and safe for our community.?

Councillors received a demonstration of the new software at last Tuesday's General Committee meeting. Pitched by Ilmar Simanovskis, Aurora's Director of Infrastructure, and Stephanie Mackenzie-Smith, the Town's Manager of Corporate Communications, it was billed as a ?really unique and innovative way of presenting solutions to our traffic issues.?

?We want to make sure residents understand why the decisions that are being made are being made the way they are,? said Ms. Mackenzie-Smith. ?The two way communication is really critical. For us, we all want to make sure we're making the best decisions possible and that our citizens are as informed as they can be. It really allows us to actually have a conversation and to provide that feedback, [get] their ideas, and then for the Town to be able to provide them with information and respond to that in a timely and relevant way.?

Added Mr. Simanovskis: ?It becomes that central place for collaborations and communication with that community. It is that space that creates our solutions focus and Council is in the loop from the perspective of actually [seeing] those recommendations forward after they have been vetted by the community.?

Aurora Speaks, they said, is about ?building a consensus? between the residents and the ultimate decision-makers and, in the end, ?empower people to make a meaningful impact on the communities where they live, work and play.?

Following this week's approval, the software will be in place by the end of this month for a launch. Open houses will be planned for March or early April to get members of the public up to speed with the new process and decisions could start stemming from the feedback as early as May.

If you're not quite internet savvy, the option to simply call in to Town Hall with your concerns will still be available, and your input will be compiled and placed by staff into the app for community consideration as well.

?I think there is a great potential for this,? said Mayor Geoff Dawe, before asking whether any mechanisms would be put in place to ensure the community dialogue remains ?civil.?

There will be, he was told, filter systems in place to block ?profanity.?

Added Councillor Wendy Gaertner: ?This will make people feel they are heard. I think there has been community frustration not having a place to go like a traditional committee. I would have been satisfied with that, but this is a lot better.?

Support for the program was unanimous around the table, with Mayor Dawe adding, following the initial pitch, that there will be opportunities down the road to apply the same model in engaging the community on other issues. They agreed.

?I want to commend the innovative approach,? said Councillor John Abel. ?It is different, engaging, and it is taking advantage of new technology. It shows the emphasis we have on communication. I am impressed and fully in support of trying this alternate approach and getting this community consensus because I often find the community buys in, you get the best success. This looks like the way we should be working on a lot of projects.