

## Aurora to sharpen potential university bid this week

**By Brock Weir**

Residents can expect to learn more details, potentially as early as this week, on whether or not Aurora will make a formal pitch to become a university town.

Councillors are due to meet behind closed doors this week at a Special Council meeting to discuss whether or not to make overtures to York University, which recently expressed interest in expanding into a new campus somewhere in York Region.

According to Aurora CAO Neil Garbe, time is of the essence for Council to make a decision of whether or not to submit a bid.

Interested parties will make a pitch to York University on April 17 and those are organized and coordinated through the Region for York University, Mr. Garbe tells The Auroran. We have an interest in it. We're still in this process at this late hour in figuring out what [that bid] looks like. We certainly have an interest and will be active, but I don't know if I can say what we have in store yet.

At the moment, priority number one is identifying a location within Aurora for a possible university campus.

We'll definitely have to identify a location as part of a bid process and that is the subject of the closed session meetings to try and figure that out, says Mr. Garbe. It is all tied up in location. If we have a location, then we have a bid. If we don't have a location, we don't have a bid.

We're hopeful [a decision will be made] because the hour is late and we really do have to make a decision in the next few days.

Whether or not Council will decide on a potential location this week is, as The Auroran went to press, unclear. But, to Mr. Garbe, what is clear are the potential benefits a university campus would bring to a Town like Aurora.

These are benefits that are well documented, says Mr. Garbe, citing studies that have shown a multiplier effect that for every \$1 invested in a university, \$1.75 would be spun off into the community.

Right away, you can see the economic spinoff is fantastic, he says. There is also the practical benefits to our residents. As the cost of education goes up, many people would be interested in staying at home and pursuing post-secondary education, so that has a direct benefit to our residents.

Then, the spin-off effect that that has of people coming into our community and spending money is just a huge draw. It drives economic development, drives property values, and it is just a tremendous boon for any community.

In his view, plans are right on track. There is still a lot of work that needs to be done, which is a challenge given the uncertainty of the situation, but he says staff are pursuing all the work that needs to be done within York University's time frames.

Interested municipalities will make their respective overtures to York University on April 17. Following that, a process which Mayor Geoffrey Dawe has likened to speed dating, it will then be up to York to whittle the applicants down to two preferred municipalities. Those results are due to be announced at York Regional Council by mid-May, Mr. Garbe says.

We will know within the next month or so what that looks like and if Aurora is successful in its partnership with York as being a preferred municipality, then an RFP will be submitted by York University. It becomes York University's process and they will make a proposal to the province and the province will make a selection after that.

The Province of Ontario has selected a September deadline.