

Aurorans can keep yearly tabs on energy reduction at Town Hall

By Brock Weir

Energy use can often play a significant part in the cost of running Aurora, but residents will soon be able to keep tabs on the municipality's efforts to reduce energy consumption and, in turn, the cost of running local facilities.

Councillors voted unanimously to formally approve the Town's Corporate Energy Management Plan last week, in one of the last decisions of the 2010 - 2014 Council Term.

The Corporate Energy Management Plan (CEMP) serves as a five year roadmap to increase energy efficiency, decrease energy consumption, and minimize the environmental impact of running municipal facilities. According to the plan itself, its overarching goal is to "establish a culture of energy conservation, while contributing to a global reduction of greenhouse gas emissions."

Over the next five years, the plan aims to review energy efficiency measures in existing buildings while strategizing for new buildings, equipment, and vehicles, the procurement of green energy and renewable technology, tracking the impacts of such measures, and ensuring these green policies are part of the day-to-day function of the municipality.

According to the report, the CEMP complements other initiatives recently undertaken by the Town including the designation of idle-free zones at municipal facilities such as local ice rinks, two stations for charging electric vehicles, the installation of LED lights where appropriate, and approving the construction of Aurora's new Joint Operations Centre to LEED Gold Standard.

"North American municipalities are increasingly focusing on energy as a strategic priority to reduce operating costs and to demonstrate their commitment to long-term sustainability," said Marco Ramunno, Aurora's Director of Planning, in his report to Council last week. "Under [Provincial Regulations] all public agencies, including the Town of Aurora, are required to report their energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions on an annual basis starting in 2013, and are required to submit five- year energy conservation plans in 2014."

"[The Plan] reflects Council's commitment to supporting, through its plans, policies, and initiatives, a vision for a more sustainable Aurora. There are significant opportunities for the Town of Aurora to improve the energy efficiency of its buildings to reduce utility costs and to minimize its environmental footprint. The Plan provides the Town with energy saving opportunities within its facilities, including both capital improvement projects and operational maintenance changes that will help to conserve energy and reduce greenhouse gas emissions."

As one of the first tasks of the new Council will be to begin the 2015 Budget Process, Councillors said it was a "great plan", but said it did not go far enough at first blush to track and monitor the success of each goal.

Although supportive of the initiative, Councillor Wendy Gaertner raised a number of questions on its implementation such as looking for partnerships with York Region's Northern Six (N6) municipalities to reduce costs and working with PowerStream to find additional opportunities to make buildings more efficient. She also said key to the success of the plan will be ensuring everyone is on board.

"It is not going to work unless we have the employees buying into this," she said, questioning whether incentives could be put in place to ensure the program's success.

She shared views put forward by Councillors Michael Thompson and Sandra Humfryes that success needs to be tracked.

"My hope is that some of these [Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)] will be a little bit more specific," said Councillor Michael Thompson. "It is admirable to say we are going to be working towards energy efficiency in the various facilities in Town, but it would be nice to have a metric or a better gauge in what savings that is generating. Personally, that is what I am looking for."

Added Councillor Gaertner, putting forward an amendment that yearly reports on these targets are made public: ?It is important?that the Town create an energy page on the website with updates on the Corporate Energy Management Plan, progress on corporate initiatives and conservation information for residents. I think it would be a very good thing to have on our website. We have a very conservation-minded community.?