

## Budget deliberations begin at Council

On behalf of the Town's CAO, Doug Nadorozny, municipal communications manager Carley Smith DeBenedictis presented the 2024-2026 Budget to Council at the first Budget Committee meeting of the year on November 13.

She began by noting several high-level accomplishments this year.

A resident satisfaction survey was completed, which was the first statistically valid, broad-based survey that the Town conducted in over 15 years, she said, and there was also development of the Town's new street banner program, which sets a framework for the use of street poll assets for both the Town and community groups.

Furthermore, leadership and strategic support was provided on major projects and initiatives including Aurora Town Square and the Town's Measure What Matters program.

Adding on a few communication highlights, DeBenedictis noted that Aurora now has the most social media followers per capita among all York Region municipalities.

Staff have seen a 50 per cent increase in their e-newsletter subscribers and YouTube channel subscriptions increased to over 900, which is nearly double that of Newmarket. Social media following across all channels has grown to over 30,000.

Next, DeBenedictis noted several of the town's key objectives for 2024.

The multiyear strategic communications plan will be implemented, which will come to Council in mid-January; support will continue to be provided to the Aurora Town Square and SARC gymnasium projects, the Town's new alternative work arrangement policy will be implemented, and leadership development with the Town's Executive Leadership team and management will continue.

There are no new full-time equivalent (FTE) requests, nor no new capital requests in the 2024-2026 budget, she said.

As for proposed budget changes, the office of the CAO proposes an operating budget increase of \$118,800 in 2024, mostly due to salaries and benefits increases for existing staff.

?The 2024 budget does include a temporary position that supports projects and communications, which is fully funded from the Safe Restart grant and has no impact on the tax levy,? DeBenedictis said.

\$104,000 is being used from the Safe Restart fund to finance the salary for a communications position that runs late into 2024.

?The increases in the following two years are also driven primarily by salaries and benefits for existing staff resulting in a total increase of \$49,200 in 2025, and \$46,800 in 2026.?

Emphasizing the importance of accountability and documentation of all expenses, Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland asked about other Safe Restart funding uses that was perhaps not listed on the documents provided to Council.

Rachel Wainwright van Kessel, Aurora's Director of Finance, replied that there is the continuation of temporary resources in IT and nothing else in the CAO's office.

?I'd have to confirm if there's anything else, I do not think there is off the top of my head,? she said.

**By Elisa Nguyen**