

Business Concierge Program expands focus to out-of-town investors

By Brock Weir

Aurora's Business Concierge Program was founded to provide resources for big investors ? like Bulk Barn ? who might be interested in doing business in Town.

But, while that is still a part of the program's mandate, its focus has been expanded to assist out-of-town investors big and small.

The ramping up of the Business Concierge Program comes as Aurora recalibrates its economic development focus.

The Town's Economic Development Advisory Committee, a citizen body tasked with, as the name suggests, advising Council on all matters business and economic was phased out last year.

Being phased in now is an Economic Development Board which, led by a newly-appointed Economic Development Officer, has the power, teeth, and financial resources to move business forward.

Working closely with that is the Business Concierge Program.

The expansion, as well as its successes to date, were touted at Council last week by Anthony Ierullo, Aurora's Manager of Long-Term and Strategic Planning.

Debuting a slick new promotional video which will be part of the package distributed to potential business investors, it featured not only an outline of the program's successes to date, but testimonials from some of the business leaders who have benefited from the initiative.

?The whole idea of streamlining approvals has always been something that we have heard from the business community when we are asking them for feedback on what we can do to make things better,? said Mr. Ierullo in the video. ?What the program does is?provide a personalized contact for every non-residential investor. That person is your contact at Town Hall who is there to help you navigate through processes, problem solve potential issues and really meet your business needs.

?We had a very limited launch of the Concierge program a few years back. It was only meant to assist really high level large investments. An example of that is Bulk Barn, [which] had a very large head office coming to Town [and] they have been great corporate citizens. A huge success story for us at the front end. Based on those successes, we have now taken this and rolled it out so it affects all of our non-residential investors.?

Jason Ofield of Bulk Barn bolstered the importance of the program, stating their efforts made a significant difference when the company was looking to relocate, ultimately settling in the Leslie Street Business Park near Don Hillock Drive and Highway 404.

?The team Mayor Dawe has in place did everything possible to meet our needs,? said Mr. Ofield in the video. ?They were efficient, they were prompt with their responses, and they allowed us to move in here in a timely manner, and that is really important for us.? A similar experience was shared by Sabrina Sgotta, Senior Planner for Weston Consulting, who said their work to develop an industrial building in the business lands was made easier by the program.

?We had to deal with some pretty significant engineering issues on the site,? she said. ?They helped us navigate through the issues that came to light. We're cognizant of the economic benefits that are going to come forward from not only this project from a client's perspective, but also on the municipality's behalf as a whole to bring jobs into the community. We were able to complete our site plan application in Aurora in under a year and we're able to get issuance and building permits for the clients to break ground, which is exactly what they wanted.?

Adding to the chorus were potential business investors such as Rick Tanton of Twisted Branch Brewing who said the team made it easy to navigate through the process.

Promotional packages such as these will only serve to help Aurora bring in new business as the last of the business park lands come up for grabs.

All 35 acres of the Town's business park lands off Leslie south of Wellington Street are sold, while the Emery Business Park on the north side of Wellington Street on the east side of Leslie holds up to 200 acres of serviced lands.

Responding to the video, Councillor John Abel, who served on the former Economic Development Advisory Committee (EDAC) questioned what this program can do ? if anything ? to secure a medical campus for Aurora.

This was a long-established goal of EDAC for previously vacant land on Earl Stewart Drive but never came to fruition.

?We have a role in promoting that and promoting opportunities for that and, ultimately, it comes down to land owners and the relationship with people in that sector to encourage investment,? said Mr. Ierullo, noting their department's help spans all sectors. ?It is making sure we properly deal with developers and investors at the back end of the cycle. They have made the decision to be here and now we have to make sure they are meeting their business goals in terms of getting tenants in place when they need to get

tenants in place and getting buildings up when they need to get buildings up.

?It is about tailoring processes and getting priority processing and ensuring the municipal processes are not a barrier to investment, which seems to be something we often hear from the investment community.?