

Business Improvement Area budget to be funded with downtown tax levy

By Brock Weir

Aurora's new Business Improvement Area is readying its budget for Council approval.

The Business Improvement Area's (BIA) budget was presented to Council at the Committee level by Board member Jack Laurion last week and it outlines a series of initiatives that will be spearheaded by the BIA in the years ahead to restore the Town's historic Downtown Core as a destination.

“We have had several meetings to try and determine what would make sense to increase the livability and business atmosphere of the Downtown Area,” Mr. Laurion told Council. “The mission of the Downtown Aurora Business Improvement Association is to support members through promotion and education, to attract new businesses that add value to the Downtown Core, and support their integration within the community, and participate in the marketing and beautification efforts for Downtown Aurora.

“With so many new changes to Aurora – being Library Square and the remodelling of the Aurora Cultural Centre – we will see positive change through marketing initiatives, running events to spotlight the Downtown Core, supporting existing businesses, building a long-range plan with the Economic Development Board to help attract new businesses that will further enrich the Downtown experience and contribute to the beautification efforts undertaken by the Town through the streetscape plan.

“Our vision is to lead the revitalization of Downtown Aurora as a Town focal point where businesses thrive, residents live, work and play, and visitors feel welcomed.”

All this, however, comes at a cost.

A final report on the BIA's budget will come forward for Council approval and enactment in the first half of May.

The budget is contingent on a new tax levy that will be handed down to businesses that lie within the geographic limits of the BIA, being the blocks radiating out from Yonge and Wellington.

BIA Board members estimate this tax levy will come out to an average of \$400 per property annually, with the 101 subject properties contributing an estimated \$40,400 to fund the initiatives.

“The levy structure is being requested as we are here to advocate on behalf of the interests of the Business Improvement Area,” said the BIA in their business plan. “We wish to maintain and improve the downtown core

area and provide a more pleasant atmosphere for local businesses and neighbouring residential areas.?

The BIA's business plan sets out three years of objectives.

In the first year, the BIA will focus \$15,000 on advertising, including the creation of websites, newspaper and social media ads, flyers and marketing materials. \$10,000 is allocated to hire entertainment for a planned series of three events which will include road closures in the historic core. More will be spent on metal buildings and lawn signs intended to designate historically significant properties to illustrate Aurora's heritage.

The second year will look at similar advertising efforts, \$7,000 for entertainment, the creation of more signage as well as a new mural on a prominent Downtown building which will illustrate the history of the core.

The third year will continue spreading the word, but focusing on the creation of a metal archway over Wellington Street to signify the entrance to Downtown Aurora.

The proposed archway, similar to the arch that indicates Newmarket's Historic Main Street when coming from the north received a boost from Mayor Tom Mrakas.

?I like [the idea] of the historic metal archway at Wellington,? said the Mayor, noting he and Stephanie Mackenzie Smith, Communications Manager for the Town, had been brainstorming ideas earlier in the day. ?We thought [about] not only one, but possibly a second one at the other end.?

?The BIA has sure hit the ground running,? said Councillor Sandra Humfries, who chaired last Tuesday's General Committee meeting. ?You have been here a few times already since your inception and I am really proud of that. Thank you for relaying the need to beautify and work on the downtown core. For me, it is critical to the success of our businesses along with the great initiatives of our Library Square.

?Thank you for continuing to push forward.?