

Chance of having a hotel decision by the end of the year on a scale of 1-10? A seven, says CAO

By Brock Weir

On a scale of 1 to 10, how likely is there to be movement on the hotel front as far as Aurora is concerned?

An optimistic seven, according to Aurora CAO Doug Nadorozny.

According to Mr. Nadorozny there are 'two or three' hotel developers that would sit comfortably on the seven marker 'in terms of doing something before the end of the year.'

His comments came after members of a working group convened by the Town's Economic Development Advisory Committee (EDAC) and the Aurora Chamber of Commerce, came together to discuss the next steps in their efforts to recruit a hotel developer to break ground in Aurora and get more 'meat' from the Town on where things currently stand.

At outset, staff said they were seeing 'momentum' on the hotel front but Mr. Nadorozny said the decision made by Regional Council in June to 'solve the development charge issue,' an issue that has repeatedly been cited as a significant barrier to bringing new hotels to York Region, was a 'formal way to telegraph to the community' their intentions to fix the issue.

But, for Javed Khan, Chair of the Aurora Chamber of Commerce, that was nothing they hadn't heard before.

'I thought [the answer] would be meatier and give us some sort of opening of the curtain to what is going on back there of what is happening,' said Mr. Khan of talks between the municipality and hotel developers. 'I always say out of a scale of one to 10, what is the possibility from today to December 31, out of a scale of one to 10, that we will have an announcement from the Town of Aurora saying we got something?'

Anything at this point would be 'speculative' said Mr. Nadorozny before stepping up to put some meat on the bones.

'They are past the feasibility, they are past the room rate, the vacancies, and they are pretty happy they have a market here, but they just can't make the spreadsheet work because of the development charge issue, so we have been working on trying to reassure them that there will be a solution in place,' said the CAO. 'The Region has been very helpful in that regard.'

'That takes the list from 15 that have contacted us down to about four or five that are at that level of analysis and trying to figure out if they can live with the development charge regime that exists. There has been land that is optioned and traded with intentions or comments around a hotel, but we have no building permits, we have no site plans, we have nothing that is that concrete that we're sitting here saying, 'There is about to be a ribbon cutting' and we're holding that back. There is nothing that is that far along.'

Going a step further to say there are 'two or three' he would put as a seven in terms of 'doing something' by year's end, he cautioned the reality could be closer to an eight or a five, but they are serious. He cautioned, however, that the reality might be there is only room for one hotel in this market and all want to be 'the first one in.'

'We can't be putting anything out there that raises the urgency for Number Two to say, 'Uh-oh, I think something is going on according to what the Town is doing, so we're going to jump in now,' said Mr. Nadorozny about being 'guarded' in doing something that would influence a decision.

Members of the committee, however, didn't seem to think raising the urgency was necessarily a bad thing.

'There is certainly interest and there are lots of people exploring the opportunity but it is not clear what the final opportunity will be,' said Councillor Thompson. 'That is the opportunity for this group and others to help influence that decision by developing those metrics, the data, by generating that interest perhaps at the appropriate stage and you can show that value and they may alter

their decision-making process to say there is reason for us to take this path versus that path.

?We all know there is a wide range and scope when it comes to hotels, and I think the efforts of this committee and others hopefully will have some impact on their final decision on which is the best investment for them but also, at the same time, we're trying to say here is what the Town really needs and we would really like it if you work with us and achieve that ? especially if Council is faced with multiple choices.?