

Climate Change prompts question of whether Aurora is flood-ready

By Brock Weir

Climate change has brought some extreme weather to the recent years, whether it has been snow days on the rise or flooding on many of Aurora's streets after significant rainfall ? now Council wants assurances that Aurora is truly flood ready.

Council is calling on the Lake Simcoe Conservation Authority (LSRCA) to tell Council whether they are ?revising any of their assumptions? about local flood plains as climate continues to evolve while, at the same time, carrying out an inventory on local dams and flood control measures in older parts of Aurora to ensure they are ready to cope with heavy rainfall.

The decision follows a motion from Councillor Wendy Gaertner who said the Insurance Bureau of Canada expects a ?severe flood event somewhere in Canada every two to three weeks between April and October.?

?I have concerns and we have a responsibility to the community to make sure that we are as prepared as we can be for climate change and this motion speaks to that,? said Councillor Gaertner. ?It is asking for a report?with respect to the conditions of our flood control measures, whether new buildings in the old part of Town is going to require any additional amendments to that and identify work throughout Town that needs remedial or new capital work ? and just what this is going to cost us so we can be prepared and not be caught short.?

The motion, she said, was timely as it came in the same meeting where Council approved the 2018 water budget which, as The Auroran reported last week, includes revised rates for water, wastewater and stormwater.

Last week's report indicated that the municipality might not be collecting enough money in stormwater billings ?to ensure the long-term viability of the system,? she said.

?My motion is about being ready with respect to climate change and adapting to accommodate it,? said Councillor Gaertner. ?In our case, I think a lot of the adaptation and preparedness has to do with flooding. There are two parts to that: one, is there enough money in our capital reserves for major restoration work and have we adequately planned out what will be required for capital investments. ?The second is the maintenance of the system and have we got adequate funding to maintain it? I would just like?whoever is sitting on Council in the future, to be able to say to residents that we are prepared and we are going to do the best we can for you.?

Council was supportive of the motion, but some had some minor reservations.

Councillor Michael Thompson, for instance, said while he supported the motion he wanted to make sure it was not duplicating work that already exists in Aurora's Asset Management Plan, as that too addresses risks in infrastructure and remedial work that might need to be carried out.

While Town Treasurer Dan Elliott said the Plan does speak to these conditions, it is at a ?high level.? Councillor Gaertner's notion would look at infrastructure particularly in flood areas to make sure everything is in good repair.

?The Asset Management Plan speaks to generalities and the 10 Year Capital Plan has some of that, but I don't think the two of them combined can satisfy the interests [of Councillor Gaertner],? said Mr. Elliott.

Throwing his support behind the motion was Councillor John Abel who said recognizing climate change is an important thing to look at.

?It was in 1973 [that insurers] noticed there were flood increases,? he said. ?Years later, we still have some people doubting there's climate change, but insurance people monitor and have stats and overwhelmingly they are reporting more claims ? and that tells you something. It's all part of how to adapt for changing. I think it is a responsible way that we should be handling what could be happening to our infrastructure, our residents and how to mitigate it.

Agreed Councillor Paul Pirri: ?Once these issues happen once, it becomes incredibly difficult for those citizens to manage getting insurance to be prepared when it happens again. This is a big issue that is being dealt with all across Canada and it is an important issue we should be aware of.?

Although Mayor Geoff Dawe said what Councillor Gaertner asked for would be a ?substantial piece of work? for staff, he said the LSRCA has already reached out to do their part.

?The rains we had in June 2015 ? we haven't seen that much rain since Hurricane Hazel and although there was some substantial flooding, there was nowhere close to what was experienced at the time of Hurricane Hazel.?