

## Committee, consultant rejected in review of Council pay

The thorny issue of how much Aurora Councillors should be paid could be resolved ahead of the inauguration of the 2026-2030 Council term.

The current Council this week rejected recommendations to strike a Council Compensation Committee to review salaries, while also voting against engaging an external consultant to provide input.

Instead, Council voted to leave the matter to staff, who have been tasked with delivering a report to lawmakers in the New Year.

Had Council greenlit the recommendations before them from staff this week, Aurora would have begun recruiting Committee members in January, with a focus on "ensuring a diverse and representative group of citizens is selected," while the consultant began the work of data gathering.

A final report bringing together the findings of the consultant and committee alike would have been presented for Council's review by the end of April.

The issue of Council's salary has been a hot-button community issue in the second half of this term of Council, with the incumbent Council voting 4 ? 3 to adopt the salary recommendations brought forward by a similar Committee struck by Council in 2023. This decision, however, was ultimately vetoed by Mayor Tom Mrakas using the then-new Strong Mayor powers, given to dozens of Ontario municipalities by the Provincial government.

The recommendation to strike the Committee was tentatively approved by Council at the Committee level last week, but some lawmakers suggested doing so was simply reinventing the wheel.

"At this point, I really think the consultant can do its job and I have full faith that the consultant has the professionalism, the capability in order to come up with the right numbers that are appropriate for Council," said Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland. "I don't think there is a need for this Committee at this point. We've already gone through this process and that's why we're getting a third party.

"I certainly want to take the political side out of this, and I think the cleanest and best way of doing this is to just leave it clean and leave it to the consultant because that's, I think, what we should be doing ? just leave it to the professionals and they will guide us in a direction that makes the most sense."

Ward 4 Councillor Michael Thompson said he was supportive of the suggestion to just stick with the Consultant for now.

"We're going to engage a consultant ? let the consultant do the work and come back to Council with a report," he said. "If at that time Council is still not satisfied, then we can discuss the need for the formation of a Committee, but for now I would say let's just go forward with the consultant and see what they have to say."

A different perspective was offered by Ward 5 Councillor John Gallo, who said bringing on the consultant was "wasting" \$25,000. Instead, he said current municipal staff are capable of carrying out the work the consultant will be tasked with.

"I have no issues with a Committee being struck to help them out and get a sense of what the community feels regarding this," he said. "I don't agree with the scope [of the Committee] because the first line in its purpose is? to review and comment on the consultant's recommendations on the compensation level for the current elected members of Council.

"It doesn't make any sense to me why the Committee would only comment on the current compensation for members of Council. This is designed for the next term. I think the decision has always been made to spend \$25,000 through the Mayor's Budget and his

decision to do that?. We're not going to backtrack, I guess, although I don't agree with it, and I think that could have easily been done in-house. But, if the will of Council is to move in this direction, I am fine with that.?

Mayor Tom Mrakas, in response, said as the RFP had just been issued for the consultant, Council could still make an amendment to cancel it.

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