

Community Code of Conduct will crack down on inappropriate behaviour in Town buildings

By Brock Weir

A new Community Code of Conduct will crack down on what the Town of Aurora describes as inappropriate patron behaviours at municipal facilities.

Approved at the Committee level last Tuesday and up for final ratification this week, the Community Code of Conduct will address an increase in inappropriate behaviour situations on municipal property that compromise not only Town Staff but other patrons as well.

Over the past few years, Town of Aurora staff have experienced an increase in individuals who display inappropriate behaviours such as the threat of violence, abusive and disrespectful language, bullying and non-inclusionary behaviours towards others, says Recreation Supervisor Adrian Wong in a report before Council. As a response, a cross-departmental committee comprised of managers from different departments was formed to address the issue. [The Code] was developed to address key issues pertaining to inappropriate behaviour in Town Facilities and properties.

There was a need, the report states, for consistent policy from the top that would support municipal staff in dealing with these situations, recognizing that the community play a role in promoting a safe and enjoyable environment for all.

The policy clearly defines the roles and responsibilities of all Town Staff, actions to take upon witnessing inappropriate behaviour, when to disengage with an individual, and actions to take when the situation escalates, which includes maintaining a safe environment for customers and staff.

The Community Code of Conduct, as tentatively approved, defines inappropriate behaviour demonstrated in person, over the phone, through email, or other avenues as violent behaviour (or threats of violent behaviour) that may affect an individual or group; harassment, abusive or disrespectful language; disrespect for public property and the damage of property of others; bullying (including cyber-bullying); deliberate misuse of cellular phones, personal digital assistants or recording devices in change rooms, washrooms and dressing rooms; smoking in non-designated areas; display [of] non-inclusionary behaviour towards others; display of hate behaviour; and contravention of any Town policies, bylaws and/or regulations.

It also defines how staff should react to each of these situations and outlines consequences to three levels of offence, ranging from a verbal warning to the notification of authorities.

The Code was welcomed by Council members last week who said it was important and timely, with Councillor Wendy Gaertner stating these policies should be on full view in public facilities as soon as a user walks through their doors.

It is our intention to put signage throughout the facility, said Lisa Warth, Acting Director of Community Services. We haven't determined the locations yet, but we need them to be visible and right up front. We will be working on that over the next few months.

While Councillor Harold Kim said he was in full support of adopting a Community Code of Conduct, he questioned how it would be enforced.

I know we have received the odd email from residents where they felt they were not treated fairly, for instance, in the pool, that their child was not getting the attention they deserve, or we had to remove the participant because of the way they were behaving or impacting how the programs are progressing, he said. There is always a he-said-she-said and parents always believe that their kids are a model of consistency. I can see how this can get sensitive if a resident is banned for a certain period of time.

Those kinds of situations are exactly what this Code of Conduct hopes to address, staff said.

Up until this point, staff have had to resolve those kinds of issues through consultation with their manager and their peers, said Ms. Warth. There hasn't been a formal process for them to follow, which is the benefit of having this kind of policy: to provide some clarity and direction to staff when we are dealing with those sorts of situations and they have a better idea how to handle them.

Added CAO Doug Nadorozny: The intent of this Code of Conduct is to provide a base point for staff to refer to. Staff have had to deal with this in the past and, in consultation with their supervisor, they have come up with a solution as the problem is presented. We still want to allow staff to use their discretion in how best to act in the situation, but at least this gives staff something to point back to as the base of the code of conduct and defines activities and behaviours that are not appropriate.

There still will be some discretion on the next steps on what happens when we encounter this behaviour, but we realise we didn't have something for staff to point to for our residents or users to say why this behaviour is not acceptable.