

Cost still at issue for Aurora Museum curator

By Brock Weir

The re-establishment of a new museum for Aurora took a significant step forward last week as Council signed off on a new curator, who could be put in place as early as this fall.

It wasn't an immediate green light, however, with some Councillors arguing bringing in a curator to look after the Aurora Collection was long-overdue, with others expressing reservations over the price tag.

The cost for a curator to bring the museum to life could come to the tune of roughly \$100,000.

Starting the job with just a few months left in the year, the curator's salary and benefits for the year would come to \$31,850. In 2015, for a full year's work, this would increase to \$111,875, and to \$116,350 by 2016.

The recommendation came to Council's consideration by Al Downey, Aurora's Director of Parks and Recreation Services, following an earlier decision by Council rejecting a bid from Cultural Asset Management Group to curate the collection under contract. Their proposed costs came in significantly less than similar bids put in by the Aurora Historical Society and the Aurora Cultural Centre.

For Councillor Michael Thompson, however, this salary scale was much too high considering the museum will be put in place in Aurora Room, the smallest exhibition space at the Aurora Cultural Centre.

“It is great for us to bring on a curator, we made a commitment when we took on the collection, as well as made it one of our objectives to re-establish the museum, and I certainly think this is a step in the right direction,” he said. “My one challenge is the cost associated with this position. When I first saw it, it struck me as a little high when we looked at the full cost for 2015. Doing a little legwork and looking at some of the other museum jobs, on average a curator's salary is around \$50 - \$60- , \$70,000.

“I would like to see more of an investigation or another report coming back on the justification for the salary range [here]. I can tell you it is in range with the ROM and some of the other large-scale municipal museums.”

While he said it was important to give a fair wage to a job, he wanted a salary review or for Council to set an upset limit on how much a curator would ultimately cost. In response, Mr. Downey said the position went through a full administrative process and through an evaluation was scored to determine a pay schedule.

Council could always appeal the pay rate, but it would then need to go through the office of Aurora's CAO as well as the Manager of Human Resources, Mr. Downey added.

“The numbers you see before you included benefits and the benefit carrier on that is 28 per cent of the salary,” he said. “It looks significantly higher because of that benefit component, so the salary itself is less than the number you see here. You add 28 per cent on top of that and that is how you get to the numbers you see before you.”

As a long-time supporter of having a curator on municipal staff to bring the museum back into reality, Councillor Evelyn Buck said it is important to find the right person for the job “and that means making sure the job is secure, and securing someone who can pull together a substantial volunteer base to keep things moving along.

“[We need] a person who can provide leadership and guidance to volunteers because here isn't any way a Town like this could afford a fully-staffed museum,” she said. “We can only provide a museum with a well-qualified leadership person, capable of rallying and organizing volunteers and giving them a sense they are really providing a meaningful program to the community. We have to offer a secure position with clear leadership terms of reference, otherwise we will get new graduates from universities looking for a little practical experience before they can go to another municipality with a couple of years' experience behind them.

?At this stage we have a limited amount of space and we are going to need the best person that we can find to make the best use of that limited amount of space and the best use of that collection which is ours to use. Like librarians, they are highly qualified, highly educated and, if we are lucky, we will find the right person who will have a lot of personal skills and a lot of leadership skills that will allow us to do something with literally very little.?

Going back to earlier discussions before Council rejected the bid from CAM, Mayor Geoffrey Dawe questioned whether Mr. Downey and his department had considered a further contract position to meet the request of Council. It was an alternative for Council to consider, said Mr. Downey, but a contract might have to be lengthy to find a qualified person, especially one capable of addressing the immediate needs of the Aurora collection. Contracts, from a staff perspective, were typically for short-term projects.

?I was thinking about when we tendered the whole process,? said Mayor Dawe. ?We had three responses and one was a group of about \$100,000 and that would have been a contract engagement. Are we looking at all the options in filling this to the most cost-effective way??

Mr. Downey concluded a full-time curator position is the only way of ?addressing the needs? of the collection.