

Council compensation will be looked at by staff instead of consultant, committee

Salaries for the next Council term could be determined by municipal staff after Council nixed striking a committee and hiring an external consultant to examine the issue.

Last week's decision was a U-turn following the December 2 Committee of the Whole meeting where lawmakers gave both the external consultant and the striking of a citizen committee the green light.

Making a move to cancel the committee was Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland who said she preferred to "allow the consultant to do its work" based on findings from the last citizen committee struck to look at Council pay.

"We have the data already and I'm sure the consultant is also going to do additional work, that's what we're paying them to do? \$25,000 actually estimated," she said. "I'm interested to see what the consultant comes back with. At the end of the day, when the consultant comes back with the recommendations at that point in time with Council we can make a decision whether or not we approve, receive, or whatever we're going to do, but I do believe we already have that information and I certainly feel the consultant's going to do the job that we hired them to do."

Councillor Gilliland's motion to take the committee out of the equation was approved by Council, but not without opposition.

Ward 5 Councillor John Gallo, for instance, said he disagreed with the viewpoint offered by Councillor Gilliland, and instead preferred to keep the committee and ditch the consultant, but said citizen-led input was valuable.

"I think our staff is more than capable and I think our residents are more than capable of putting this information together and providing a report to us to make a decision for the next Council," said Gallo. "I have absolutely no interest [in] spending \$25,000 (for a consultant). It's somewhat hypocritical when this first came to us through a committee's recommendations to spend money on our salaries. It was vetoed, now we're spending \$25,000 to figure out how to address our salaries. It just doesn't make any sense to me. I wish there was a committee to oversee that, but that's fine. Staff are more than capable of figuring this out. Really what it ends up being is math. I believe we should be in the 50th percentile. I've always believed that. That's not very difficult to figure out? especially now, more than ever, we should not be spending \$25,000 to figure that out. To me, that's a total waste of money."

Some Council members, on the other hand, thought the money would be well-spent to have a third-party look at compensation and take the "politics" out of the process.

"We want to save money wherever we can, but I would like to take this for one-time, arm's length, and have a consultant and possibly decide for the future about the percentile and really just not have anybody associated with the Town be making this decision at this time, just because of what we've been through," said Ward 3 Councillor Wendy Gaertner, referencing the fraught discussions around Council compensation that happened around the table last year.

"I don't like to spend the money, but I think this is a place to spend the money," she added.

Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese said he saw both sides of the coin and while he was interested in saving money, there was value in a consultant bringing back "an external, objective report."

"At the end of the day, it's going to come back to Council anyway to be enacted, so we'll have the opportunity to judge that based on the report," he said. "I'm thinking that this may not be a bad thing for this one time to pay for the consultant, to have that objective and professional view?. I see both positions, but I think it's time for some objectivity."

Council's ultimate decision will leave recommendations up to staff, a move that Aurora CAO Doug Nadorozny suggested was unusual compared to past practices.

?We generally like to get outside consultants involved when we're looking across the range of whether it's internal compensation or Council compensation,? he said. ?We usually engage outside consultants who are familiar with the environment, but if we're directed, then we'll figure out how to gather what information we can and bring something back.

?We do [that] for staff compensation so that there's an outside party and it's not seen as self-serving by staff. Obviously, staff looking at Council [compensation] is not the same relationship as staff looking after other staff, so there's a bit of separation there. It's more to get the outside expertise and the knowledge of what's going on in the broader environment, but I guess it is something we could research on our own if need be.?

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