

Council shoots down option for Regional alternate

By Brock Weir

Citing just five more meetings on the calendar before the 2018 Municipal Election gets underway, Council is poised to say 'no thanks' to an option to appoint an alternate voice to represent Aurora at the Regional table.

Council, sitting at the Committee level last week, voted down a recommendation to establish Aurora's Deputy Mayor, Councillor John Abel, as Aurora's back-up voice representing the Town's interests at the Regional level. A final decision on the matter is expected to be made this week.

Mayor Geoff Dawe, as Regional Councillor, is currently Aurora's lone voice at the table and an alternate would have been able to speak out on the Town's behalf and cast a vote if the Mayor was unable to attend a meeting.

But, with an election in the offing, some Council members argued it was too late in the term to appoint the Deputy Mayor conventionally the top vote-getter in the Council race to the position.

'I think seven months before an election is the wrong time to be appointing someone to act in this capacity,' said Councillor Paul Pirri. 'In my estimation, there has already been some level of politicking going on and regardless of who the policy is currently pointing to, I think it is the wrong time to do that. Further on down the road as well, I think it should be left up to the Council in the next term to decide who their alternate is. There is no guarantee that a deputy mayor wouldn't have a full-time job and thus other commitments so they wouldn't be able to act as an alternate. I am not 100 per cent in favour of doing this right now. For the next seven months the mayor is well-positioned to serve this council and Regional Council.'

Mayor Dawe, who has been a long-time proponent of an alternate, took the flipside of the debate, stating from his perspective that the appointment of the Deputy Mayor would be just for the remainder of this term. He acknowledged that more fulsome representation at the table, particularly with a second full seat for Aurora, has been advocated for but it is not yet in the offing.

'This is the best we have right now and we keep trying to push that ball up the hill,' said Mayor Dawe. 'It's better than what we have now [but] it is not as good as what we would like.'

King Township, he mentioned, recently appointed a similar alternate to act in the stead of Mayor Steve Pellegrini who, at the time of the debate, was attending the Winter Olympics in South Korea with his daughter.

'We have been asking for an alternate in some way, shape or format at the Region for years,' he continued. 'We have something I am of the opinion we should move forward on.'

For others, moving forward on this would be settling for second best.

Councillors have been long-time advocates for that sought-after second seat, efforts which have been repeatedly shot down by the rest of Regional Council.

'We haven't been advocating for an alternate all this time; we have been advocating for additional representation,' said Councillor Michael Thompson, adding he believed the motion on the table would establish the Deputy Mayor as the alternate well into the next Council term. 'We might see it differently, but my perspective is we might have settled for an alternate because we couldn't get additional representation, but that is something we can debate offline.'

'I agree with the perspective that the timing isn't right. There are only five Regional Council meetings left before the end of the term, so to speak. I would rather see it be set up for December 2018 or the next term of Council. I see this is let the next Council decide who that person is. For all we know, the deputy mayor of the next Council may or may not be able to attend meetings on Thursdays or have a conflict.'

This was a view shared by Councillor Tom Mrakas, who added, 'In my opinion, it is a little bit of settling. It essentially kills all chances of ending the conversation about us possibly getting that second seat.'

Also catching Councillor Thompson's eye was the recommendation that the alternate receive \$100 extra a month to be prepared to sub in for the Mayor, plus a further \$100 for every meeting he or she might have to attend.

It is the responsibility of each Council member to 'be informed' of the issues impacting Aurora from the Regional level and they shouldn't be paid \$100 just to read the agenda.

This objection to the \$100 was enough to raise the eyebrows of Councillor Abel.

Councillor Abel, who has very often found himself in opposition to the majority in this Council term, said his fellow Councillors were making their decision based on personality rather than policy.

'I didn't realise you would go to this level, but certainly the \$100 is as petty as you can get,' he contended. 'The fact you want to decide who goes and represents doesn't surprise me at all because that is the way we do things here now.'

At this point, Councillor Paul Pirri called a question of privilege.

?I think if the Councillor was listening to the debate around the table, I think we were talking strictly about what is right for the remainder of this term,? said Councillor Pirri. ?Nobody was talking about him. It is inappropriate to talk about individuals being petty.?

Councillor Wendy Gaertner, who chaired last week's General Committee meeting, found in favour of Councillor Pirri's objection and called on Councillor Abel to apologize. After he had done so, he continued.

?I would have considered it an honour and a privilege to represent as an alternate at the Regional level and I thank staff for making the recommendation. I feel that after seven years I have the confidence of the community and I think it would have just been a privilege. I will take the fact that it was even brought forward and recommended as a privilege and an honour.?