

Council to Vote on dissolving Aurora BIA

On December 2, Council passed a motion to vote on the dissolution of the Aurora Business Improvement Area (BIA) at a future meeting. This decision follows a governance review presented to Council in February, which found that the BIA had been unable to fulfil its intended purpose as outlined in the Municipal Act.

The Aurora BIA was established in 2018 as a self-governing organization funded by but independent of the Town that would oversee the improvement, beautification, and promotion of a designated area in downtown Aurora. However, the BIA's ability to function as a standalone entity has been in question for some time.

In November 2023, Council requested a review of the Aurora BIA's governance model to determine whether it was effectively serving the community. The resulting February 2024 report identified several challenges, including a lack of member engagement, an over-reliance on municipal assistance, and inefficient use of funds. The report concluded that these issues made the BIA's current governance model unsustainable.

Council asked the BIA Board of Directors to prepare a strategic plan to address these issues by the end of the year, but the group was unable to do so. They had also failed to implement their approved work plan for 2024.

"What I understand from this report is that the BIA just hasn't been able to fulfil the requirements to leave them as a standalone entity," said Ward 3 Councillor Wendy Gaertner at the December 2 Committee of the Whole meeting.

The February 2024 report recommended dissolving the BIA, citing not only a lack of member participation but also the redundancy of its efforts. Specifically, marketing and promotional activities undertaken by the BIA overlapped with those of other organizations outlined in the Municipal Act, such as the Aurora Chamber of Commerce and the Aurora Economic Development Corporation (AEDC). The report suggested that these organizations have had more success with a more efficient organizational model, making the BIA's efforts inefficient and duplicative.

"I want to extend a thank you to the BIA board and to the Councillors in particular who have served on this board," said Lisa Hausz, The Town's Manager of Economic Development & Policy, during the December 2 meeting. "This report is not a reflection of those individuals at all. It's more about the structure, timing, and [that there is] a number of other organizations that can carry the ball a bit better."

If the motion is passed, the BIA will be dissolved, and its responsibilities, along with any remaining assets, will be transferred to the AEDC. This shift will integrate the BIA's functions into the broader economic development framework for downtown Aurora, aiming to create a more cohesive and sustainable approach to community engagement and business support.

By Selena Loureiro