

Councillor opposes mandatory vaccines for municipal employees

Town Hall is once again open to visitors with continued health and safety protocols in place reflective of the global pandemic.

But one element of the protocol is not sitting well with one Council member.

Last week, Councillor John Gallo spoke out against municipal employees being required to show proof of vaccination before returning to work.

"I felt compelled to say a few words around the Town of Aurora and mandated vaccine policies," Councillor Gallo told his colleagues during the Public Service Announcements segment near the end of last week's General Committee meeting. "I wanted to just speak to the 200 or so employees of the Town of Aurora that I don't agree with what is happening.

"I want them to know that these are very difficult times for everyone and that I respect those who made decisions to vaccinate. Equally, I respect those who are choosing not to, but more so I respect the sanctity of everyone's privilege, especially in this country, that it is nobody's business what you do medically with your body. That is between you and your doctor.

"I realise [this view] is not shared across the board, but I did want to reach out to all members of staff to let them know that from at least where I sit, that is my viewpoint on this."

Town Hall announced mandatory vaccinations for all employees on August 30.

In a statement at the time, Mayor Tom Mrakas said that the decision was made by CAO Doug Nadorozny "in alignment with recent announcements made by many public and private sector organizations."

"The Town is moving forward with a mandatory vaccination requirement for all Town employees," said Mayor Mrakas. "We believe that it is our responsibility to take this additional step to protect everyone, given the rapidly changing COVID-19 situation and the pressure that we are under as a region and a province. With today's announcement, all Town staff will be asked to provide proof of a first vaccination dose before October 1, and of both a first and second dose by November 1, unless they have a valid medical or human rights-based exemption.

"As an organization, we believe that this is the best possible approach to ensuring the health, safety and wellbeing of both staff and members of the public."

Councillor Gallo declined to comment further on his position, but said he would be bringing forward a motion to allow for rapid antigen testing for all Town of Aurora employees, volunteers and students.

"Not everyone who has COVID-19 will show symptoms," said Councillor Gallo in a draft of his motion.

"Regular rapid tests provide an extra layer of defence against the spread of the virus. Along with public health measures such as frequent handwashing, physical distancing, wearing a mask and vaccination, workplace screening will help to: slow the spread of COVID-19; keep employees, their families and your community safe; safely reopen the economy.

"Rapid tests are fast, easy and safe. They provide results in 15-minutes and allowing employees the option of undergoing frequent rapid antigen testing maintains the health and safety of workers from the hazard of COVID-19 and provides employees a level of privacy."

PROOF OF VACCINE REQUIRED FOR RECREATION FACILITIES Proof of vaccination will be required for all visitors to recreation facilities ages twelve and up.

The new roles came into effect September 22 in line with provincial legislation.

“Ensuring that both staff and patrons are fully vaccinated will help keep our community safe and increase vaccination rates as we continue to confront this next wave of the pandemic,” said Mayor Mrakas in a statement.

All recreation facilities patrons will be required to provide proof of vaccination (two doses plus 14 days) with exemptions for medical reasons, youth under the age of 18 who are actively participating in an organized sport, training practices, games and competitions, including sports leagues, organized pick-up sports, dance classes, swimming, and skating. Anyone under the age of 12 is also exempt as they are not yet eligible for Health Canada-approved vaccines.

All health and safety requirements will continue to apply at our facilities including screening, masks and physical distancing,” said the Town. Vaccine receipts can be downloaded from the Provincial Booking Portal or by calling the Provincial Booking Line.

An enhanced digital vaccine receipt with a QR code is expected to be launched by the Ontario government next month, and is slated to come into effect on October 22.

By Brock Weir Editor/Local Journalism Initiative Reporter