

Councillor Paul Pirri will not seek third Council term

By Brock Weir

Councillor Paul Pirri will not seek re-election.

The two-term Councillor, who has served on Council since 2010, announced his intentions at last week's Council meeting while presenting a report from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM), on which he is a Board member.

"I would like to thank my Council colleagues for letting me sit on the FCM Board over the last four years," he said. "I hope I have done well to represent you all on the Board. This will be my last FCM report that comes through Council because, as many of you know, I am not running for re-election."

The Councillor's announcement prompted words of thanks from his colleagues for his nearly eight years of service.

"Thank you to Councillor Paul Pirri for all the hard work he has done over the years at FCM, not only on FCB, but hearing he is not going to be running for re-election," said Councillor Tom Mrakas. "The four years with Councillor Pirri have been excellent and I have enjoyed it. We might not have agreed on every item, but I do know his heart is with the Town and all his [decisions] are made in the best interests of the Town. Thank you very much for everything you have done for the Town."

"I echo that," said Councillor Wendy Gaertner, bringing focus back to the report itself by asking what stood out in his mind that would be particularly pertinent to Aurora.

Top of mind, said Councillor Pirri, were the complex realities that will come into play once cannabis is legalized in a few months.

"One of the examples that sticks broadly in my mind when we were discussing this issue, and I know [Regional Chair] Wayne Emmerson has expressed this, but if you're going to be looking for a breathalyser for somebody, that test is 30 cents and the test for marijuana can be in the \$44 [range]," he said. "If you're having a R.I.D.E. check and you're going to be running people through this test, from an expense standpoint, it can be very expensive."

"The FCM has advocated for a much fairer pricing structure on the prices and where the revenues end up going. Ontario has fared well and I think a lot of the other provinces have signed on to the breakdown that was recommended. There is more work to be done to make sure it is implemented properly."

Indeed, the report notes the FCM was "pleased" the Federal Budget reiterated the government's commitment to revenue sharing, along with a further \$81 million to fund police training and equipment.

The organization will "continue discussions with the Ministries of Finance and Public Safety about the anticipated municipal costs and will push for federal/provincial/territorial agreements that outline a municipal share. FCM's position remains that all costs incurred by municipalities stemming from the legalization of cannabis need to be recovered through some means. The excise tax is one way to fund those costs, and FCM has called for a 33 per cent carve-out for municipalities based on available data of estimated costs. However, excise tax alone does not meet municipal needs. We will continue to push for costs to be covered in other ways."

In adding his kudos to Councillor Pirri, Mayor Geoff Dawe noted that a recent presentation by York Regional Police reiterated many of the concerns over enforcement and striking a better financial split needs continued work.

Council also focused on FCM's highlights on housing and homelessness.

Key findings from the FCM's Homelessness Partnering Strategy have received traction and they will continue pressing the Feds for more action.

"Housing is a Regional responsibility within York Region so I think the only thing we can do is continue to be strong advocates for the need for more funding and the need for more to be built," said Councillor Pirri. "There was a large commitment from the Liberal Government in the last budget cycle with regards to housing and homelessness. For the first time in a long time, the Federal government was stepping back into that role because they had stepped out of funding affordable housing in the last few years. It was good to see the Federal Government step forward to get back into the ring."