

Councillors add additional meeting during campaign

By Brock Weir

Councillors have begun to flesh out their calendar for 2014 and while nominations for next year's municipal elections open in just over two months, the prospect of an election is already making ripples.

Following Council approval earlier this month, a further Council cycle could be added for October 2014, right in the heady final days of Council.

Nomination applications for Mayor and Council will be available at Town Hall come the New Year, closing on Friday, September 14. After that, the heat of the election campaign is truly on. John Leach, Clerk for the Town of Aurora, recommended September 23 as the last Council meeting before the October 27 election day.

After polls close and the 2014-2018 Council was determined, the outgoing Council was next set to meet on November 25 before the new Council inauguration on December 2.

Councillors this month, however, had other ideas. They voted to add additional Council dates in October and a further meeting on July 29 to help plow through town business piling up in the summer.

"When I look at the calendar, I can only see five Council meetings in a period of five months from July to October," said Councillor Michael Thompson. "I understand there are some issues around decision-making and the incoming Council, but my preference is to list the meetings there and if they are not needed, cancel them. Five meetings in five months strikes me as wrong.

"We only have the two meetings in the summer and this will be our fourth year in a row when we inevitably have agendas that are packed and we never get them done. Every time we say it will be different next time, but it never is. To me, two meetings in the summer are not enough to deal with the business that always seems to come up. It just seems like we're setting ourselves up for failure by maintaining that status quo."

The further meetings were supported by Mayor Geoffrey Dawe.

Mr. Leach said there would be little impact in adding a cycle for September 30 and October 7, but not scheduling meetings in October was following what transpired during the 2010 election. In response to a question from Mayor Dawe, Mr. Leach noted there are no limitations as to what kinds of decisions Council can make in the weeks immediately preceding an election.

For Councillor Evelyn Buck, therein lies the problem.

"I have seen decisions made in a meeting in October," she said. "They were bad decisions and they were made because they were within an election campaign. That is just the reality of politics. People are not mindful of the power they can exercise if they can have a Council meeting in the middle of an election campaign. They can get all kinds of things approved by Council.

"It is a powerful effect when you've got a campaign going on and dozens of people in the room pressuring you to do something you never intended to and would never under any other circumstance do.

"I would rather see an extra meeting outside of the election campaign. I would like to see us finish a body of work, get where we want to be, before we go back to the voters, than have a meeting within the campaign."