

Councillors vote to begin looking into creating a 24-Hour warming and cooling shelter for extreme weather

Aurora Council voted unanimously last week to explore the creation of a 24-hour warming and cooling shelter to help residents during extreme weather events.

The motion, raised by Ward 5 Councillor John Gallo at last week's Committee of the Whole, requested that Town staff bring back a report that discusses the feasibility, provides price estimates and potential locations for such a facility.

During the meeting, Town Director of Community Services Robin McDougall provided context on the current warming and cooling services in Aurora. McDougall explained that while the Town's recreation centres are used as temporary warming and cooling centres, these services are only available during the centres' operational hours. This means that the shelters are not open overnight.

She added that the creation of warming and cooling shelters is "typically a Region provision, and there are Regional shelters/seasonal shelters/around the Region that support individuals in need."

Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland inquired about potential funding for the initiative, asking McDougall, "I certainly welcome [this motion]. Does the Province typically also help in some of the funding for this as well?"

McDougall responded, "As this is typically a service provided by the Region, I'm not clear on exactly who provides funding for this service. We don't have the provisions typically within our structure of Social Work Provisions. So, I will definitely be consulting with the Region and finding out what the structure could look like if we were to have one."

All Councillors expressed support for the motion, but emphasized the importance of collaborating with the Region on this project.

"I think that the Region has to be involved in the development of this report—at least in consultation," said Ward 4 Councillor Michael Thompson. "I think it's fair to say that they're the subject-matter experts, that they have certainly more experience in dealing with this issue."

Ward 6 Councillor Harold Kim added, "I completely understand the urgency and importance of

addressing the need for emergency warming and cooling centres—but I'm also in alignment with what staff have said in terms of partnering with the Region, given that we have a \$130 million operating budget, 44% of which goes to the Region for services such as social services. So, partnering with them and having them be involved with this financially and otherwise, I think, is important."

McDougall also reassured Council that anyone in need could access support through the Region's existing shelters.

"Speaking with the Region, there are some spaces available in our existing seasonal shelters across the Region that individuals—if they let it be known they'd like support—then the Region can assign them to those shelters," she said.

Town staff will begin the process of investigating the feasibility of creating this kind of shelter in Aurora and report back to Council with a more detailed report at a future meeting. Last week's decision is expected to be ratified at the March 25 Council meeting.

By Selena Loureiro