

Debate highlights divisions on building a 'cohesive' Council

By Brock Weir

While some Councillors backed a motion from Councillor Evelyn Buck to have Mayor Geoffrey Dawe to define his own view of the mayoral role last month, debates stemming from the motion showed divisions around the Council table on how they see the Mayor's role and also how they perceive accountability.

Some Councillors share the principle outlined in Ontario's Municipal Act that the Mayor is Aurora's Chief Executive Officer, and at whom the proverbial buck ultimately stops. Going back to an earlier comment made in the discussion by Mayor Dawe that Councillor Buck's motion smacked of a pre-election 'silly season', Councillor Chris Ballard said he disagreed with that assessment and her motion deserved comment.

'I think there is a sense of frustration that the CEO of this organization is accountable to this body for making sure that what this body wants done in dealing with senior staff is actually done,' said Councillor Ballard. 'I have heard individual councillors talk about issues where they have voiced concerns in front of us all only to see those concerns return. Without getting into details, I think that is at the root of a lot of frustration that is emanating tonight.'

Councillor Ballard added it is the responsibility of the CEO to ensure, demonstrate, and remind Council and administration of their roles in ensuring accountability. Mayor Dawe, on the other hand, rejected the mantle of the 'CEO.'

'If I was truly the CEO, some things would be dramatically different,' he said. 'Whereas the Municipal Act does define that the office of the Mayor is the CEO that, at the very least, is a misrepresentation for anybody who has ever acted in that role. Those functions, those responsibilities, those rights are not available for the office of the Mayor. Anyone who thinks they are, are either sadly disillusioned or they are trying to mislead others.'

At the end of the day, however, Councillor Buck's motion related to 'accountability' not just from the Mayor to Council, but for Council as a whole of the elected body.

'The fact is Council is the sum of its parts and we are nine parts, each one of us with a single vote,' she said. 'Nobody has more authority than the other. We are not subject to your authority. We are subject to a majority vote that is cast on any question.'

'It might be a little late in some people's minds to think that we could become a cohesive unit and I think that is what has been lacking from the very beginning an attempt to create a cohesive unit and we have not functioned as a Council. We have functioned as separate blocs on a council. We either sink together, or we acquit ourselves well. What I am seeking clarification on is what the problem is that we are not working together as we should be.'

Some Councillors, including Councillor Michael Thompson, expressed some 'surprise' that there were questions from Councillors on what these roles are.

In Councillor Thompson's case, he said he was surprised these concerns were coming from Councillors who had been at the table for more than one term.

'I have to wonder what their thoughts are really about,' he said. 'I would hope their understanding is that Council as a whole is a governing body, not a managing body and we direct staff. At the end of the day, they need to meet those expectations because failure to do so then raises those additional questions. It is pretty basic, in my opinion.'

'There was another comment about a cohesive unit and I think you need to look at yourself for that. There are nine people here and if the intent is for every one of us to bring forward a report on cohesiveness and how we're working together than I would have a little bit more support for that but, as someone said, it is the sum of all parts and the only way to get a cohesive unit is if all parts are

working together.?

At the end of the day, although he voted down the motion, Mayor Dawe said he would be happy to set out in writing how he perceives his own role at a future date.