

Developer wants incentives to do business with Aurora as Town reviews development charges

By Brock Weir

Aurora estimates nearly \$45 million will come into municipal coffers over the next five years from new developments.

This is the forecast coming out of a proposed new bylaw on Development Charges.

The revised bylaw had its first airing at a public planning meeting last month, which focused on significant new growth in the northeast corner of Aurora, particularly in the 2C development between Bayview Avenue and Leslie Street, north of Wellington Street.

Recommendations will be discussed by Council this week.

Some developers, however, say further incentives are needed to make Aurora a more attractive place to invest.

The new bylaw covers a wide variety of changes made to the existing Development Charges bylaw, which takes money from developers to account for new and increasing strains on existing infrastructure resulting from increased population or business activity.

According to Mr. Elliott, the proposed changes to the bylaw have been made in consultation with local developers, particularly those with a stake in 2C, and have largely focused on harmonizing Aurora's development charges bylaw with that of the Region of York.

‘If you choose not to have a bylaw, and you're still going to provide that level of service, you're going to have to put it on the property taxes, water, and sewer rates, or utilize some other financial resources.’

Recounting the consultation process, Mr. Elliott told Councillors that a number of issues were raised between Town departments and consultants on items that needed to be tackled through DCs. Among these were a thorough review of all roads, trails, and underpasses slated for the near future, the costs of servicing parks, as well as the apartment issue.

Although Mr. Elliott said the team has a raft of changes they believe are ‘reasonable, defensible, and applicable,’ not all developers are content with the changes.

Speaking on behalf of Emery Investments, which is constructing the Addison Hall business park on the east side of Leslie Street in 2C, Audrey Jacob said more needs to be done to ‘differentiate’ between the DC rates for industrial versus retail properties.

‘We note the forecast is very robust in terms of industrial forecast,’ she said. ‘Recent trends show there has been a downward trend in industrial jobs in Town, so we would like to see some possible incentives to non-residential development, particularly industrial and office. We think a differentiated non-residential rate could incent developers to relocate in the Town of Aurora and meet your growth forecast.’

Ms. Jacob went a step further to suggest Aurora should consider a 20 per cent discount or rebate on industrial DCs with any shortfalls resulting from that 20 per cent to be made up from either user rates or taxes.

Although Councillors made no decision one way or another on that request, when questioned by Councillor Evelyn Buck on whether the lack of developers in the audience signified they were ‘content’ with what was on the table, Mr. Elliott said that was his opinion.

‘I believe the development community is satisfied with the work and the proposed new charge,’ said Mr. Elliott, agreeing, however, that if they were not satisfied, they would still have the Ontario Municipal Board open as an avenue to appeal.

Although the recommendations passed the first hurdle at Public Planning, some Councillors said they were not satisfied with the process, particularly Councillor John Gallo, who said he hit roadblocks in trying to sit down with the consultants to discuss the DC bylaw.

Councillor Evelyn Buck expressed a similar view that no matter what DC charge is on the table, it will be 'dumped on' the new homeowner. Although she said she was 'flummoxed' by the consultation process, the process had been followed.

'I am going to vote for it, but at the same time my conscience screams out that it is not fair, it is not reasonable, it is greedy and grasping,' she said. 'If we had to take it in taxes, we would be thinking direct taxation from people, and we would have to give a lot more thought to it. It is putting our hands in people's pockets and they don't even know it is being done to them.'