

Education program could address swimming pool discharge

By Brock Weir

Despite stormy weather, many Aurorans spent this past Civic Holiday weekend basking in the sun around the pool ? but what happens when the pool has to be cleaned? That is a question the Town might ask you to give serious consideration.

This month, Council will consider a recommendation from Aurora's Environmental Advisory Committee calling on a public education campaign and strategy to ?instruct? residents on the proper discharge of water from private swimming pools and hot tubs.

In their recommendations, the committee (EAC) underscored the importance of getting this education campaign up and running well before the fall, ahead of local pool owners preparing to close their pools for the winter season.

The issue of pool discharge, and its potential impacts on the environment, is an issue which was brought to the fore by local environmentalist Peter Piersol, a former member of EAC, who said he began to question the impacts on the local watershed whiling away a summer evening a few years ago in a friend's back yard.

Their property, he said, backed onto a creek, and all of a sudden significant noise rose nearby and from the flow in the creek it was clear a neighbour was discharging water into the creek.

From that point, Mr. Piersol set out to determine just how many pools in Aurora backed onto creeks, waterbodies and the Oak Ridges Moraine.

?We could see the adverse impacts,? he said. ?Aurora is on the Oak Ridges Moraine and also at the headwaters of the Lake Simcoe Watershed. Here are creeks that are very important and flowing into very important watersheds. [Through Google Earth] I found 140 pools backing onto creeks and streams. There are many that don't. There is an issue here.?

Compounding that issue is other municipalities such as Toronto, Brantford and Mississauga have certain guidelines on the books to govern the issue of pool maintenance and the environment, but Aurora falls short. Getting Aurora up to par with the others would require a bylaw ? either new, or a revision of an existing bylaw ? which would then be incorporated into the Town's stormwater management plan.

?We need initiatives so we can protect our creeks, rivers and the moraine,? he concluded.

Changing the stormwater management plan could be a lengthy process, but committee members agreed education could happen ?almost immediately.?

?Without that, we won't get anywhere,? said member Melville James. ?Guidelines will just get tossed away and little handouts just get tossed away. We have to look at this from a public awareness approach.?

While the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority has mechanisms in place to monitor the flow into local waterways, the Town would see the value in an education program, said Christina Nagy-Oh, Program Manager for Environmental Initiatives at Town Hall.

?I am all for public education because I think when you use common sense you can actually prevent a lot of damage and I think it is actually a lot easier and more effective than having bylaw officers go out and neighbours snitching on neighbours and that kind of negativity,? she said, responding to concerns voiced by committee member Nancee Webb, who said she would like to see fines for people who break rules surrounding pool discharge.

?I think there are better ways. I think everyone should consider the ramifications of all that. As for the water quality, both solid and

liquid chlorine added to pool water turns into gaseous vapour and evaporates into the air. It will dissipate from the stormwater sewer before it goes into the creek.?

While an education component on discharge from pools and hot tubs into the local environment, including storm sewers, could be the order of the day with Council's approval, other issues should also be on the radar, cautioned Ms. Nagy-Oh. These include coating and sealing of driveways which she said was a ?massive issue? and significant source for hydrocarbons getting into run-off water.

?We have a lot of issues we need to contend with and I want to make sure that if we're putting effort into this we're also doing other important things [to target] other major pollutants.?