

Electronic cigarette ban stubbed out by Council

By Brock Weir

People relying on electronic cigarettes to help kick the habit can rest a little bit easier, following a Council decision to pour water on a ban on using the devices inside Town facilities.

In a 5-4 decision, Council rejected a recommendation from staff to prohibit the usage of electronic cigarettes in places like the Aurora Public Library and arenas, arguing they don't want to put roadblocks in the way of helping people curb their habit.

The recommendation for the ban stemmed from an incident at the Aurora Public Library where staff asked a patron using an electronic cigarette in the building to leave, according to Town Solicitor Warren Mar. Upon further inspection, however, the Library realised there was nothing on the books actually preventing the use of the devices and asked the Town for some assistance.

"Electronic cigarettes currently exist in a regulatory grey zone in Ontario and Canada due to the limited research on the overall benefits and harms of the devices," said Mr. Mar in his report to Council. That being said, it is within Council's power under the Municipal Act, 2001, to implement a by-law that bans the use of electronic cigarettes within Town facilities.

"Protecting users of Town facilities from the unknown effects of second-hand electronic cigarette smoke encourages the public to continue using Town facilities and promotes an active and healthy lifestyle."

Speaking against the motion, Councillor Paul Pirri said he wasn't convinced the recommendation fully grasped the concept of electronic cigarettes, arguing that a ban was "premature."

"In addition to not knowing whether there are any health implications, I do know people who have used these things to help them quit smoking," he said. "To me, we're not 100 per cent at a point where we have studied all the necessary health benefits to be able to go on one side or another."

"I understand that there are some municipalities who are going this route, there are other municipalities who are currently studying this issue. I personally think that it makes more sense for us to wait until any conclusive evidence is shown in one direction or another before we jump to banning a substance of which we don't know whether there are any problems to begin with."

Also in support of rejecting the ban was Councillor Evelyn Buck. A former smoker, she said people who are addicted to cigarettes "deserve all the support we can give them."

"I support the banning of smoking in government buildings and restaurants," she said. "I think the people who are harmed by second-hand smoke have rights too, so I support all those bans but I can't see how any person is harmed by an addicted smoker using one of these things. I can see no reason at all for the Town to have a bylaw to ban the use of these gadgets. Anything we can do to help people lick the habit, I think we should do it and not put obstacles in their way."

Councillor Sandra Humfries said she too was not convinced this was the right way to go, and said more time should be taken to consider the full scope of a ban.

"I have heard from many people who successfully quit smoking because of these things, and it added to their health in a positive way," she said.

The motion to bring the ban forward was moved by Councillors John Abel and Don Constable. Speaking in favour of the ban, Mayor Geoffrey Dawe said he had not heard specific objections to banning the use of e-cigarettes in Town facilities overall.

"I think it is prudent," he said. "We're not talking about an outright ban on the product. I have had some discussions with people who have used them and they are very grateful they are out there, but they didn't have an issue with regards to a limited ban in Town facilities."