

Energy Plan proposed to make community more efficient

By Brock Weir

Could a Community Energy Plan provide the municipality, residents and businesses alike with a blueprint towards greener living? That is the hope of Council, which approved laying the groundwork for just such a plan last week.

Unanimously approving a motion from Councillor John Abel, which calls on staff to prepare a budget for a Community Energy Plan ahead of this year's budget deliberations, it is intended to support local development, fostering behavioural change, and a culture of conservation within the municipality.

Councillor Abel told fellow lawmakers he was inspired to bring his motion forward following a federal budget consultation hosted last month by Aurora's two MPs and the Aurora Chamber of Commerce. There, John Taylor, Newmarket's Regional Councillor, spoke about his Town's Community Energy Plan, which aims to create a sustainable community whose energy future is efficient, secure, reliable and environmentally responsible.

Markedly different from Aurora, which sold its own energy utility to create the Town's Hydro Reserves, Newmarket maintains its own system and, therefore, a greater degree of control over the success of their Community Energy Plan. But, Councillor Abel said the structure is applicable here as well.

The targets they set to do by 2031 is to reduce per capita primary energy use by 40 per cent, he said, noting that it can spur economic development, behavioural change and education, energy efficient buildings, transportation efficiency, and efficient land use planning. I think the plan is about the community. The scope would be commercial, business, industry, residential, as well as municipal. Everyone would participate and be involved and encouraged to follow the recommendations in the plan, and that basically is to reduce your energy and greenhouse gasses, which is a worldwide concern.

For many Councillors, one of the primary selling points of Councillor Abel's motion was the Province provides matching funds up to \$90,000 to make it a reality.

It is good to take advantage of [the opportunity], said Councillor Michael Thompson. When the report comes back, I would like to see some information around the funding and the probability of us being successful because I think it is a big difference. It may influence our decision on whether or not we pay \$180,000.

For Councillor Tom Mrakas, the Community Energy Plan is an opportunity to build on Aurora's existing Corporate Energy Action Plan, approved in 2014 with the development of the Town's Environmental Advisory Committee (EAC), which outlines energy efficiencies at the municipal level.

It sets out our objectives and goals within it, he said, suggesting the development of a Community Energy Plan go to EAC for their input as well, as well as stressing that Aurora has been proactive when it comes to identifying efficiencies. Staff, with the help of a consultant, did an excellent and extensive job in putting this together and it speaks to all these things and I think that this is something that can help enhance that.

Added Councillor Wendy Gaertner: I support anything that will help our environment, be responsible and reduce energy consumption and protect the planet.

The suggestion was taken up by Councillor Abel, who said once it is vetted through EAC, the plan could also be reviewed by the incoming Economic Development office for its input as well, followed by community stakeholders.

For Councillor Paul Pirri, it is also important to get a buy-in from Aurora's current energy supplier, PowerStream, as well.

A community like Newmarket has a financial incentive to draw up one of these plans because if their businesses are spending less money on electricity, everybody is being more efficient. As the owner of the utility it helps to drive that process, he said. I agree this is something we can do but I think as we move forward it would be more important for us to discuss with our utility to have them incorporated into the plan. Maybe they want to pay for a portion of it because it is going to help them in the long run, just like Newmarket is undergoing this because it is helping their utility system.