

## Ethics code up for approval this week

**By Brock Weir**

After very little discussion last week, Aurora Councillors could approve a new Code of Ethics as early as this week.

The new Code of Ethics, a combination of the Town's controversial Code of Conduct, which was formally rescinded last month, and the previously standing Code of Ethics, was introduced before Councillors at the committee level last Tuesday.

Drafted by Town Clerk John Leach, the new document outlining the roles and responsibilities of Councillors has many of the same principles of the two previous documents but, unlike the Code of Conduct, there are no specific penalties contained in it.

Providing something 'with teeth' to govern Councillors' behaviour was one of the key things supporters of the Code of Conduct hung their hats on, but supporters of going in a different direction argued there was enough legislation in place to keep local legislators on the straight and narrow.

Councillors had their first encounter with the new Code of Ethics at the Committee level last week. As they reviewed the document, some said they wanted more information on what provisions came from which document.

'It references that some items were brought forward from the old Code of Conduct and some were brought forward from other municipalities and although we always have the opportunity to look at it the old fashioned way, it would be good for me to have a tracking change document,' said Councillor Michael Thompson.

'The other concern is I think it is good to have a linkage between the Code of Ethics and the Municipal Act where it sets out the role of Council and some of their responsibilities.'

Mr. Leach will table a revised report to Council this week outlining just such changes.

Being carried over from the Code of Conduct include the principles of transparency, accessibility and equity, that 'public office is not to be used for personal gain', 'attaining an elected position within the community is a privilege which carries significant responsibilities and obligations', and the duty of Council members to 'work together for goodwill and common good'.

The new Code of Ethics also carries through principles regarding hospitality and harassment which were extensively detailed in the Code of Conduct.

Staying on the books will be clarity regarding campaign contributions, clarity on the relationship between public officials and candidates and volunteers, and allowing Council members to accept 'food, lodging, transportation, and entertainment provided by other levels of governments or boards, or commissions; and reimbursement of reasonable expenses incurred and honorariums received in the performance of activities connected with municipal associations or agencies.'

As for harassment, the new Code of Ethics makes it clear that 'harassment of another Council member' is subject to the Ontario Human Rights Code. It extends the definition of harassment to well beyond the confines of Town Hall or the regular duties of Council.

'Harassment includes, but is not limited to, any behaviour, conduct or comment by any person that is directed at or offensive to another person on the grounds of race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, age, handicap, sexual orientation, mental status, or family status and any other grounds under the provision of the Ontario Human Rights Code.'