

Fire department targets 10% budget hike

By Brock Weir

Costs for fire services in Aurora and Newmarket are expected to increase over 10 per cent next year.

Council could take a crack on influencing this number as early as this week as the 2014 Central York Fire Services (CYFS) Budget appears before them at the Committee level. As The Auroran went to press Tuesday, Councillors were due to consider the recommendations from the CYFS to increase their funding by 10.3 per cent to \$22,553,705 for the year, up by \$2.1 million from the 2013 Budget.

The major drivers for the draft 2014 CYFS operating budget include increases in salaries and benefits due to the potential arbitration award, a property lease for a training facility, an increase to the Asset Replacement Fund contribution and a share in operating costs of the York Regional Police's new radio system, said the Joint Council Committee, the group of Councillors from Aurora and Newmarket which oversees the operations of the CYFS.

The facility currently being used for training in Newmarket will not be available next year, and that will account for \$100,000 in the budget. They will also be required to put in some funds for the radio system, which is currently covered by the YRP, to the tune of \$50,000.

More significant chunks, however, can be attributed to a greater investment in the CYFS' Asset Replacement Fund.

The budgeted 2013 ending balance of the CYFS asset replacement fund is a deficit of approximately \$11 million, said the CYFS in their budget. The 2014 draft CYFS operating budget proposes a \$250,000 increase in the contribution to improve [the reserve] position.

\$153,571 in salaries and benefits, deferred from last year, is also due to come on board to fund a new Chief Training Officer, as is \$118,130 for a new Fire Prevention Officer, and a further \$27,000 to convert one part time position to full time.

Should this pass, Newmarket's share of the bill will be 60.05 per cent, while Aurora's will be 39.94 per cent, down slightly from 40.25 per cent last year.

Councillors will be asked this week to send their comments on the budget to Newmarket's Council, which will have ultimate signing authority on the budget. Although he said it is not particularly time sensitive to make these comments, as the next meeting of the JCC is not scheduled until early September, Newmarket's budget plan is putting Aurora slightly under the gun.

Newmarket Council has set an aggressive review and approval schedule for its 2014 operating budget, said Mr. Elliott. It is hoping to make final approval by the end of October 2013. This requires early review and commitment by Aurora on the CYF budget, as our comments are a requirement under the Joint Services Agreement between the two municipalities. Newmarket has final budget approval authority under the agreement, however Aurora must be given the opportunity to provide comments to Newmarket for consideration prior to their final approval.

JCC has had one meeting to review and discuss this budget with no formal amendments being made. JCC have now referred it to Aurora for comments.

Following consideration of this report, Aurora will not have significant opportunity to influence the 2014 CYFS budgets. However, as Aurora's comments will not be considered until the next JCC meetings scheduled for early September, Aurora could defer determining its comments until subsequent meetings, provided same is held prior to the end of August.

Each year, Aurora voices similar dissent to the budget as is and calls have been made, particularly by Councillors John Abel, Chris Ballard, and John Gallo, Aurora's three representatives on the JCC (Councillor Gallo is the committee chair) to give Aurora more authority, or a greater impact, on the final decision with Newmarket.