

## Fire master plan delayed pending divisive workshop talks

**By Angela Gismondi**

Discussion on the Central York Fire Services (CYFS) budget has been deferred until Aurora and Newmarket councils hold workshops on the fire master plan.

The decision was made at a Joint Council Committee (JCC) meeting held last week at Aurora Town Hall.

The draft 2015 Fire Services budget proposes a \$23.6 million operating budget, an increase of \$1.5 million over last year, which translates to about a 6.9 per cent increase. The figure includes \$852,000 to implement the fire master plan.

At the meeting, Fire Chief Ian Laing said service level improvements are needed and have been put off for years. Both Newmarket and Aurora are growing municipalities and need more support.

It was Newmarket Councillor Jane Twinney who first requested that the master plan be brought before the respective councils, to gauge their opinions and receive input. According to Councillor Twinney, both councils need to discuss the master plan and the budget and the recommendations should be incorporated into the plan.

‘Personally, I don’t see how we can approve a budget if we haven’t approved the (fire master) plan yet,’ said Twinney.

Aurora Councillor Michael Thompson said he disagreed. He said having the workshops would unnecessarily delay the process, and the adoption of the master plan and budget.

‘It’s our job to make decisions,’ said Thompson. ‘This is just adding to the process. What if we’re not any further ahead after a one-day workshop? It could cause further delay ? you are essentially delaying the adoption of the master plan for some time.’

After being asked to weigh in on whether or not further talks would be beneficial, and any risk associated with delaying the plan’s approval, Chief Laing reiterated the importance of having a master plan to address the needs of the community.

‘It’s all a risk,’ said Laing. ‘I’m not here to tell you people are going to burn in their beds. This is not fear-mongering. It’s a genuine document that addresses the needs of the communities.’

‘Central York Fire Services, to me, is one entity. The issues identified in this fire master plan are similar to the issues unresolved in the previous master plan.’

He went on to say that the fire master plan has been delayed for some time and there are holes which need to be plugged. As the population grows, there will be more pressure and it will become more difficult to meet the level of service needed. A new fire station will also be needed to meet that demand and to respond to the needs of the area on the border between the municipalities, he added.

‘We have to get our house in order first before moving forward with anything else,’ said Laing. ‘Last year I was whittling the list down and cut it down basically to nothing. It’s important that we start addressing some of these issues because for the last three years we’ve put some of these decisions off.’

Newmarket Councillor Tom Hепен said he would prefer to see the fire master plan deferred to a workshop as quickly as possible.

‘I don’t want to put our community at risk, but what is before us is a significant cost to the community,’ said Hепен. ‘How we implement that needs to be discussed with my colleagues.’

Twinney said she didn't see the harm in deferring the matter and said it would help everyone understand the big picture.

Aurora Councillor Tom Mrakas said he disagreed.

'I'm not in favour of a workshop,' he said. 'We've done our due diligence. Our councils have put us here and put their faith in us to make decisions. This will delay it. I don't see a problem with us approving it.'

As Councillors looked for ways to reduce the budget, Newmarket's Joe Sponga suggested one way to do that might be to cut out the proposed new fitness program, which will cost about \$130,500, especially since the department is not sure about the benefits of the program.

But Laing said the program will not only save the department money, it saves lives by assessing, monitoring and developing fitness routines for firefighters to make sure they're able to fulfill their duties.