

Gender-based and intimate partner violence declared an epidemic in Aurora

The Town of Aurora has declared gender-based violence and intimate partner violence an epidemic and requested that provincial and federal governments provide the necessary support to meaningfully address the epidemic.

The motion was put forward by Mayor Tom Mrakas and was up for discussion at the September 26 Council meeting.

There, Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland expressed her support for the motion to bring forward awareness to gender-based violence and intimate partner violence.

"I think it's good that everybody recognizes that there is a challenge going on," she said.

Especially during the pandemic, the Town and many Councillors supported local organizations such as Yellow Brick House which provides help and hope to women and children facing violence, Councillor Gilliland said.

On November 5, an annual fundraising walk called "Break the Silence - Step in My Shoes" organized by Yellow Brick House will take place. Councillor Gilliland said it was "good timing" that council supported the motion on the table to further show support to the issue of gender-based violence.

"We should support these organizations as much as we can because silence is definitely what's happening behind closed doors, and there is an epidemic going on that is out there. So, this is a good reminder that we need to ensure we don't forget the forgotten," she said.

The fundraising walk takes place at St. Andrew's College from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. on November 5 and more information can be found at yellowbrickhouse.org.

Mayor Mrakas added that the issue of the epidemic has been discussed in many municipalities, as well as by the Ontario big city mayors. The issue was brought to his attention by a few residents along with other mayors across the province.

"I've always believed that it's important for us to stand up when we have issues like this and specifically, rally together to ensure that things change, because intimate partner violence is absolutely, in all forms, unacceptable and should never occur," he said.

Numbers of intimate partner violence rose during the pandemic, Mayor Mrakas said, adding that it is disheartening to hear what has been happening.

"I'm glad that we will be passing this [motion] in joining with our colleagues right across this province and stand united and saying that intimate partner violence needs to end."

Ward 3 Councillor Wendy Gaertner noted that the woman and family shelter in Aurora, Yellow Brick House, has told the Council that the situation has been tough and that getting funding is difficult.

"It's an expensive thing to do well; you have to nurture and protect the people who have come to you. And I hope that the government will provide some of the resources to meaningfully address this," she said.

In the motion, the Town of Aurora recommended that gender-based violence and intimate partner violence be declared an epidemic in the Province of Ontario, by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, and all municipalities and regions in Ontario.

The Town of Aurora also requests that the provincial and federal governments enact the additional 85 recommendations from the

inquest into the 2015 murders of Carol Culleton, Anatasia Kuzyk, and Nathalie Warmerdam in Renfrew County, Ontario, which provide a roadmap to preventing intimate partner violence from escalating to femicide.

The Town of Aurora also requests that the federal government start the enactment by adding the word Femicide as a term to the Criminal Code of Canada, and that the necessary support is given to municipalities, regions, and their emergency and social services to address the issue.

By Elisa Nguyen