

Inflationary increase reviewed in Town's 2023 Operating Budget

An inflationary increase of 4.83 per cent has been applied to the Town's Fees and Charges in anticipation of Aurora's 2023 Operating Budget.

Last week at the Committee level, Director of Finance Rachel Wainwright-van Kessel said in response to a question from Ward 5 Councillor Gallo that the applied rates of inflation vary across departments as they also consider how surrounding municipalities have set their fees.

She said that there are various initiatives that happen within the department to determine how the fees are set and that not all the fees are on a full cost recovery basis, which allows the Town to fully recover the cost of providing a specific service or use of property.

‘There's a number of community programs where the ability to play and participate is also considered, so some of those fees are not necessarily to full cost recovery, or some other areas which are more focused on development and planning are done on a full cost recovery basis. So, there's generally a fair bit of analysis and studies that go on within the departments and they are reviewed on a fairly regular basis,’ said Wainwright-van Kessel.

When asked by Ward 2 Councillor Gilliland about whether memorial and park benches were running on full cost recovery basis, Wainwright-van Kessel confirmed that it was the goal.

Councillor Gilliland had previously inquired about potentially allocating some memorial and park bench fees to green initiatives and said she had reached out to the Aurora Community Arboretum and will continue to do so.

Ward 3 Councillor Gaertner inquired about whether application fees for residential and apartments were comparable with other municipalities and if there was a way to reduce the fees to encourage multiple residential apartments.

‘I just like the Town [should do] anything we can to encourage that form of housing which would be more affordable.’

Director of Planning Marco Ramunno confirmed that it was comparable with other municipalities.

Councillor Gallo noted the category breakdown for playing field user fees did not specify the types of organization that would have priority. He said that not-for-profits based in Aurora should take precedence whereas for-profit organizations based outside of Aurora should be last on the list of priorities regarding playing field usage, fees and availability.

‘They should never have preference. If there's anything left, great. If it's filled up by the people who are actually paying for the facility, that's the way it should be.’

Director of Community Services Robin McDougall replied that the assessment of categories would be done based on similar turf analysis and that she can get more information to Council on how it is defined.

McDougall said they are not suggesting an increase in fees regarding the Lind Realty Sports Dome, will complete the review in 2023 and return back with a report in 2024, with a categorization review included in the report.

‘But as it relates to the existing turf field, I'll get that information.’

In response to a question from Ward 4 Councillor Michael Thompson who inquired about the substantive price increase from \$227 to \$776.20 for minor site plan agreement, including stable neighbourhoods, Town Solicitor Patricia De Sario replied, ‘The increase was to deal with the Council concerns about the application being done from non-owners, and that it would be a builder who would be requesting the application for the stable neighborhood minor site plan agreement. But in any event with Bill 23, this agreement

fee is moot because we won't be doing it anyways, anymore.?

Councillor Gaertner asked about the fee for minor variances or permission on the Oak Ridges Moraine Residential.

?I would like those to be higher because I don't think anybody should be asking for variances on [the] Oak Ridges Moraine.?

?We do have a zoning bylaw that does require variances to be submitted for any alterations within the Moraine,? Ramunno replied.

Ward 6 Councillor Harold Kim followed up on how the pricing policy report for community services fees and brought to Council in 2021 impacted this year's fees and charges.

McDougall replied that the suggestions from the report are being applied, for example, with young recreational programs or adult programs.

?When it comes to us determining the price that goes into the Recreation Guide for the delivery of that particular program, from term to term depending on what's delivered, the cost may fluctuate. So, we want that flexibility to be able to recover it where we can, and, as such, the fee is applicable. So, we have the range to allow us that flexibility to ensure we meet those set guidelines and the pricing policy,? she said.

?For example, in recreation, if it's a brand-new program we want to see what the trends are like, what the community's engagement is on that program. We will evaluate within that range that Council is approved, we might offer that program to start with, just to see how it goes. ? As the program became more popular, the adjustment of cost recovery would have been adjusted to recover more.?

Councillor Kim also inquired about the increase in park access administration from \$250 to \$400.

Parks and Fleet Manager Sara Tienkamp replied that the park access fee was not previously on the bylaw and that the current costs now that it has been added are in line with road occupancy program costs.

By Elisa Nguyen