

Joint Operations Centre cost concerns sent back for answers

By Brock Weir

Councillors hope a future report will paint a 'full picture' on the true costs of Aurora's new Joint Operations Centre.

The Joint Operations Centre (JOC) was recently completed at the top of Industrial Parkway North and is now the home of Aurora's Department of Public Works, as well as the Parks Department.

Earlier this month, Councillors received what was intended to be a 'final' report, wrapping up the \$20+ million dollar project, but it turned out to be anything but a final report.

Lawmakers raised several questions on what the true cost of the building ultimately is after a several items were taken out of the scope of the project, deemed unnecessary at the time, only to be added back in at a later date.

At the previous week's General Committee meeting, Council members lobbed several questions over the project at CAO Doug Nadorozny, Treasurer Dan Elliott, and Ilmar Simanovskis, who was, until this past Friday, February 3, Aurora's Director of Infrastructure. Not content with some of the answers they received, they opted last Tuesday to send the entire report back to staff for more number-crunching and overall clarity.

'Last week, there were a number of comments made by Council around the table and I share the concerns with the information in the report,' said Councillor Michael Thompson, who chaired the January 24 General Committee meeting and was unable to fully wade into the discussion until last week. 'I know our CAO took copious notes on additional information that members of Council are looking for, and I just think, in my perspective, it is more appropriate to refer this report back to staff and ask that that be done.' Seconded by Councillor Tom Mrakas, Councillor Thompson's motion found additional support from Councillor Sandra Humfries. 'It is very important,' she said, on turning this matter back to staff. 'After thinking about it last week, what I would like staff to do is almost an audit of the whole sequence of events, what happened, when it happened - the full story. There may have been some additional information that may not be clear. We have to have it all on the table as to why this was done, and what decisions were made so we're all clear on what the case really is.'

Meanwhile, efforts continue to pay for the project.

Aurora's former Works Yard on Scanlon Court was recently sold for \$3.01 million dollars, but work is ongoing to clean up the lands, a condition of sale.

Proceeds from the sale of the land will go towards offsetting the cost of its multimillion dollar replacement, the Town's new Joint Operations Centre.

Right now, Aurora has set a budget of \$250,000 to clean up the land, which was in use as the Town's Works Yard for over 40 years, such as the removal of fuel storage tanks, Mr. Simanovskis told Council.

In total, a maximum of \$500,000 could be shaved off the proceeds going back into Town coffers if one factors in the sale costs, he added.

Councillors questioned how long it would take to pay off the construction of the new JOC, which was built on a 10 year debenture, to be paid off by development charges, the sale of Scanlon Court, and the proceeds of industrial and business lands on Leslie Street. Some offered concern that DCs wouldn't cut it.

'We're reaching build out,' said Councillor Wendy Gaertner. 'The 2Cs are going to be built out in a couple of years. If we're not going to get that DC financing by the time the 2Cs are completed, where are we going to get it?'

Marco Ramunno, Aurora's Director of Planning, told Council the development charges were mapped out over a 10 year period and, outside the 2Cs, there are other developments coming down the pipeline in other areas of Town that will contribute to the DC funds.