

Joint Operations Centre falls just short of the Gold standard

By Brock Weir

It isn't even done yet and already Aurora's new Joint Operations Centre is falling just short of getting the Gold.

Nearly a further \$100,000 will need to be spent on the already costly build on Industrial Parkway North, which will bring the Town's departments of Parks & Recreation as well as Public Works under one roof.

When the Town approved the project in the last term of Council, they specified ? and allocated the money for ? the project be LEED (Leadership and Energy and Environmental Design) Certified Gold, with certification monitored by the Canada Green Building Council that evaluates based on sustainability, energy efficiency, and other ?green? criteria.

The investments Council has made to achieve the Gold, however, were only enough to clinch silver, they learned last week, raising the eyebrows of Councillor Michael Thompson who sought answers on why more money was needed to achieve the standard they already targeted.

?LEED Gold was always a standard we had approved and we put aside money to achieve that for the Joint Operations Centre (JOC),? he said. ?When I look back through all the different reports we had, in fact, increased our fees to the architect to ensure that the building would be Gold. [Now] it says we?need to do additional things to get to Gold. On top of that, we have to increase the funds to the architect again and it doesn't really indicate why.

?We made a decision, we had lots of debate over LEED Silver or LEED Gold and, at the end, we said Gold and, as a result of it, costs were going to increase. We said that's fine and now I see a report that says, ?Yes, you may have made a decision to go to LEED Gold, you may have increased the cost of the building, but we're not at LEED Gold.?'

Turning to Mayor Geoff Dawe and Councillor John Abel, who sit on the financial task force monitoring the JOC build, Councillor Thompson requested more information.

Mayor Dawe said Council did indeed direct the project to hit LEED Gold, but there have been complications.

?Somewhat surprisingly, it turns out there is a fluid nature to what gets classified as LEED Gold and what does not,? Mayor Dawe explained. ?There is a number of items that seem to be somewhat subjective in terms of how LEED Gold is determined.?'

Added Councillor Abel: ?One of the main criteria for Gold is the rehabilitation of a brownfield. When you present all these things that inspire LEED designation, it is subject to the body to say, ?You asked for five points, we're going to give you four,' and there is a margin of error. One of the biggest things we didn't realise when we [went] for the Gold was [the issue of] brownfield. That should have been discussed at that moment when we were realistically going for that certification. Had we known that, we might have phrased it a little different: do your best to get to Gold. Having said that, with the consultant and the architect, they feel that if they present a more detailed and more robust application, they might be able to attain that Gold.?'

This was a view largely shared by Town Treasurer Dan Elliott, who told Councillors that there is just one shot to file a submission for LEED Gold. There is no ?running back later with changes, amendments, additional arguments or more information,? he said, but they are close.

?We believe we need a few more points to kick it over just in case one or two [potential points] get dismissed,? he said. ?The additional funding is to have the consultant actually assist us in preparing some specific action items, document plans, and other documents that will be part of the submission that will help us achieve several other points. We hope that in doing so we can catch a Gold.?'

Councillor Thompson, however, said he was not satisfied with these answers and, ultimately, the matter was referred back to staff for more information. If there is a \$100,000 increase to achieve what Aurora has already paid for, he argued, there is a missing piece of the puzzle.

?We paid for something, now I am hearing they missed the mark, so I am wondering: what did we pay for?? he asked. ?Now we are paying again for that LEED Gold standard. For me, this is a significant issue and I am not sure why there are no details here to educate Council on this issue and I think it is a miss.?