

Joint Ops open house focused on better communications with residents



By Brock Weir

What Aurora had was a failure to communicate ? and that's what Saturday's open house at the Municipal Works Yard on Scanlon Court was hoped to rectify, according to Mayor Geoffrey Dawe.

A steady stream of people came to the works yard off Industrial Parkway North on Saturday to learn more about the proposed Joint Operations Centre, a plan for the very north end of the street that will consolidate the works department with the Parks Department, all under one roof.

Some, such as representatives from the Aurora Arboretum, came to learn more about the building that will be adjacent to their tree preserve, others came out of their own interests, while Joey Maginnes jokingly handed a brochure at Mayor Dawe asking him to sign where it said the new facility wouldn't have an impact on the tax rate.

'The reason we are doing this right now is we didn't communicate it as well as we needed to,' said Mayor Dawe of the \$23 million plan. 'The whole purpose of this is to communicate and these folks confirmed that ? you don't really know what is going on until you have the opportunity to come out and say this is what we're doing, this is how we're paying for it, what we have got now, this is where we'll moving and they say, 'Ah, this makes sense.'

'Some of it is we simply didn't communicate well enough and some is because some people are deliberately misinforming [the public]. It is not a 'Taj Mahal' that we're building. We as Councillors sit in a very nice Council chamber that is heated in the winter, air conditioned in the summer, and we use it for an average of six hours a week. Then we wonder why we are going through all this grief and aggravation for our staff and it is pretty obvious why we need to do this.'

Giving his own tour to some residents, he said they were most struck by space challenges in the current facility, including filing cabinets stored in the bathrooms.

Visitors to the open house were able to grab a quick barbeque bite courtesy of M&M Meat Shops before embarking on a tour of the works facility, as well as outbuildings, including the salt dome, and a presentation upstairs, including a video from Ilmar Simanovskis, Aurora's Director of Infrastructure and Environmental Services. In the presentation, he outlined shortcomings of the current facility including costs.

What was once a \$14 million project now stands at approximately \$22 million which still has to be funded. Associated works to the tune of \$4.6 million are already covered by budget dollars previously allocated over the last few years. This price tag includes land

for the 10 acre site, the construction of buildings, site preparations for the topographically-challenged land, as well as engineers and consultants to make it happen.

“The decision to build a new Joint Operations Centre on a new site has taken eight years, and my study, investigation and forecasting has occurred over that period,” said Mr. Simanovskis in the video presentation. “We are now at that stage where the need is clear, the direction is plotted and the team is ready to go. This is a milestone for the Town and Council that will set us up for great successes in the future.”

Speaking to The Auroran afterwards, he too stressed the communications message that they needed to convey the benefits to the community of such a project.

“We looked at where we are coming from and the facilities that we have right now and the needs, and looking forward as to where we want to go, what our future needs are and how that integrates into the community's future,” he said.

Leading the public in tours throughout the facility was Luigi Colangelo, Manager of Operations. In the sessions, he said he fielded many questions, particularly at this time of year related to winter maintenance as well as space.

“It was brought up during my tour that there is no female facilities downstairs and we only have one female bathroom downstairs,” said Mr. Colangelo. “I know other municipalities have females working in operations; we don't, but if we did there would be an issue because it is all designed for the males that work here. It poses a problem.

“It makes sense that both parks and operations are in the same yard building. Right now we are in two separate buildings and they have operations in other parts of town. Operationally, it doesn't make sense to me and this building is not very cost-effective when it comes to the cost of heating and air conditioning. We're paying double now because we're paying for two buildings as opposed to one!”