

Looking to get married in a hurry? Look no further than Town Hall

By Brock Weir

Spring arrives this week and as the season approaches, the wedding plans of many couples across Aurora are kicking into overdrive.

If the no muss, no fuss option is more your speed, however, Town Hall could provide an option for you as early as June.

Council approved offering civil marriage ceremonies at Town Hall last week. With their green light, up to two ceremonies varying between 15 and 20 minutes in length will be available on the second Friday of each month beginning in June or July in Council Chambers for \$250.

According to a report from Stephen Huycke, Town Clerk, Aurora was the lone holdout across York Region on not offering civil marriage services, but there is a growing need.

The need for civil marriage services by the residents of Aurora will likely grow as a result of demographic shifts within the Town, he said. According to the 2011 National Household Survey, 12,205 out of 52,385 persons in Aurora, or 35.2 per cent, identify as having no religious affiliation. This compares to the 2011 census where 6,980 out of 39,815 persons in Aurora, or 17.5 per cent identified as having no religious affiliation.

Persons who have no religious affiliation, or for whom a particular religious service of their choosing is not readily available, require access to civil marriage solemnization services to enter into the legal state of marriage.

Couples interested in holding their weddings at Town Hall will need to reserve their date and time, meet with the Town Clerk two weeks ahead of the ceremony to pay, provide their marriage license, and go over the words to be said at the service.

Council widely supported the recommendation last week, but they raised an issue with Councillor Wendy Gaertner who said cost-benefit analysis of providing these services was lacking in the report.

From the way I see it, it is going to take up a lot of staff time, she said. I don't think it is going to bring in much money, if anything. It is here as a convenience to residents and, as it says in our report, every community around us offers the service. It doesn't mean we have to. Unless we were going to contract this out to provide the customer service to our residents, I think it will be disruptive to our department and I don't think it will bring any benefit to staff's efficiency or workload.

While Mr. Huycke's report said the ceremonies would bring in \$3,000 annually into Town coffers, he said at last week's meeting he couldn't be clear on how much of his time these ceremonies would take up.

The amount of time per civil marriage ceremony offered is extremely minimal and can certainly be covered within the department's business requirements, he said. Should it become too much, we do have other options, such as a contractor, that would allow us to address if the demand gets too high.

Others, however, saw this as a welcome service to residents.

Some people may not have a certain religious faith and they don't have a building they can go to to get married there, said Councillor Tom Mrakas. It just makes sense for us to provide that service for the residents who need it.

Added Councillor Michael Thompson: I see it as a minimal disruption and I think it is important to also look at opportunities to generate revenue.

At the moment, Council Chambers is the designated wedding space, but Councillor John Abel suggested other options might be available, including Petch House, which has been reconstructed across the parking lot from Town Hall, behind the Aurora Seniors'

Centre. The program, however, has been left open-ended and other venues could be in the mix.

?It's great and I think it is a really good opportunity for us,? concluded Mayor Geoff Dawe. ?It can be kind of fun.?