

Mayor and Councillors are underpaid compared to other municipalities: report

By Brock Weir

Aurora's Mayor and Councillors are underpaid compared to their counterparts across York Region, according to a staff report which will be before Council this week.

The report comes over a year after Council approved a \$9,000 pay bump for the Mayor leading the 2014- 2018 Council, while rejecting other benefits --- such as long-term disability for the mayor ? altogether. The recommendations were initially made to Council by the Council Compensation Committee, but this week's report goes a step further in making recommendations to Council.

?In discussions with the Mayor, it was expressed that Council positions would benefit from the view of the essential knowledge, skills and abilities required and expected of a Mayor and Councillor,? said Aurora CAO Neil Garbe in his report to Council. ?To that end, staff evaluated both positions using the Job Evaluation process developed in 2012 to objectively review positions in the Town. The results were then checked and validated by comparing the results through a market compensation survey and targeting the 50th percentile. This is the same process used for all positions at the Town.?

According to the report, the review looked at salaries not just in York Region, but also those in Durham and Peel. It found that the Mayor's position was evaluated at a ?Grade Level 9?, translating to salary of \$84,801 annually. As for Councillors, those positions clocked in at \$68,328 annually if they were full-time positions, but as Aurora's Councillors are part-time, a Grade 7 calculation comes in at \$34,170 annually.

?In keeping with the Corporate staff compensation policy of paying at the 50th percentile of the marketplace and eliminating the high and low, the mean annual salaries for the survey data set for Mayor and Councillor are \$80,737 and \$33,614 respectively.?

Currently, Mayor Dawe earns a salary of \$57,719 annually outside of what he earns as Aurora's representative at Regional Council. Councillors take in \$27,522 annually. Beginning in the next term of Council, the Mayor's salary will increase to \$66,719.

Council will have three options when they consider the matter this week. The first is to approve the increases coming out of this most recent review, go with the 50th percentile, eliminating the high and low for the Council term ahead, or keeping the status quo of what was already approved last year.

In recent months, as time draws closer to the municipal election, salaries of Councillors, and the roles of Councillors themselves have come increasingly into the forefront.

On the election ballot this year, voters will be asked both if they support Aurora moving to a Ward Council system whereby each elected Councillor would be responsible for, and accountable to, a specific section of town, as well as being asked if they support the number of Council members being knocked down to six from the current eight.

While some candidates, such as Anthony Pullano, have advocated for a reduction of Councillors but significantly increasing their salaries and adding a staff complement, others have questioned whether it is time for Aurora to consider full-time Councillors.

At the previous Council meeting, Councillor Wendy Gaertner spoke about attending a workshop during the day about urban tree canopies, which wrapped up at the noon hour.

?One of the limitations of having part-time Councillors is it is hard to do a complete job of gathering information and representing the residents,? she said. ?I don't know if and when we'll have that discussion, but if we are expected and invited to do things from 8.30 a.m. to 12 p.m., and we are only part-time Councillors, it does make it very difficult for most of us.?