

New Aurora Councillor to be selected at July 29 meeting

By Brock Weir

Aurorans will find out who their newest Councillor is by the end of next month, following Council's approval of a process to replace Chris Ballard on Tuesday night.

Councillors signed off on a plan to open up the process to fill the vacancy left by Mr. Ballard following this month's Provincial Election, to the public. Those putting their names forward will have to state their case before Mayor Geoffrey Dawe and the remaining seven Councillors on why they should be selected to fill the seat. The decision will then be made by Council in public.

Mr. Ballard submitted his resignation to Town Hall just prior to last Tuesday's General Committee meeting. The timing of the vacancy puts Council in an awkward position. Under the Municipal Act, the window between now and the October 27 municipal election is too narrow to hold a by-election, but too wide to get by without appointing someone to fill the position.

Discussing options before them, Councillors appeared to be resigned to what they had to do according to the Municipal Act, but questioned the point of going through such a complicated process for such a short period of time.

"I think we should take the least amount of time and trouble to fill this vacancy," said Councillor Evelyn Buck. "We are going into the summer and, when the summer is over, we are going to be in an election and have a minimum of participation in the Town's business affairs by whoever gets appointed to fill the vacancy.

"[I know] the legislation requires us to fill the vacancy, but I don't think we should spend any more time, or put people to any more inconvenience."

Councillor Buck said she opposed the process of going forward and inviting applications from members of the public "whether they are former Councillors, those interested in running for Council this year, or simply members of the public willing to lend a hand" and then coming to Council and making a pitch to Mayor Dawe, the remaining seven Councillors, and the public at large, on why they would be the best person to the job.

"I think it is expecting too much from people to ask them to go through that and I don't think there is anybody around this table who has any illusions about what it is like to be up there and making your pitch," she concluded. "It is not an easy thing to do. I don't think [what we are asking] is worth asking people to put themselves through that, plus the expense and the work it is for staff to do it. I don't think we would be criticised at all under the circumstances for taking the simplest route there is."

There did not seem a general consensus, however, on what the simplest route is. Although Councillor Buck told The Auroran last week she was in favour of simply appointing a former Councillor to keep the seat warm, Councillor Gaertner, on the other hand, said the simplest and most "democratic" way to go about this was simply continuing down the list of runners up from the 2010 election.

Councillors have to be careful about giving someone a possible unfair advantage over prospective Council candidates in this case, cautioned Councillor Gaertner, as well as keeping in mind whoever fills it.

"I agree it seems like a lot of work," she said, of Councillor Buck's position. "I know [it is required] but to sit here for six weeks, I think we should just go down the list of the choice of voters and see who wants to sit here for six weeks."

The process coming to Council this week in throwing nominations and applications open to the public at large is very similar to how the Town of Richmond Hill filled a similar vacancy last year. While some Councillors said the situations were not entirely comparable given the amount of time still left on the Municipal calendar in December, they said it was a fair and transparent way to move forward.

?I think what we have before us, as we have seen in other municipalities, is a very fair, open and transparent process that allows anybody to participate in, and a decision would be made between those who choose to put their names forward,? said Councillor Michael Thompson. ?It doesn't preclude anyone from moving their name forward, so if they finished ninth or fifteenth in the last election, it is very inclusive. I think it is the best option at this point in time.?

Mayor Dawe said he agreed.

?I fully support the process we are going through,? he said. ?We will be able to advertise what we are looking for and people will help make that decision themselves, whether they choose to participate in the process.?