

New clerk appointed by Council amid structure changes at Town Hall

By Brock Weir

Effective last week, Aurora has a new Town Clerk in Stephen Huycke, who was formally appointed to the post by Council this month.

Mr. Huycke's appointment comes amid turnover in the office since the start of the year. After over four years as Aurora's Town Clerk, John Leach left his the post effective February as his department was absorbed into the Department of Legal Services.

Until early this year, the role of Town Clerk also came with the position of Director of Customer and Legislative Services.

Following Mr. Leach's departure, his role was filled by his deputy, Cindy Mahar. After a few weeks on the job, however, Ms. Mahar left the Town of Aurora for a directorship with the Township of New Tecumseth.

Since Ms. Mahar's departure, the role was filled temporarily by Town Solicitor Warren Mar. In a memo to Council, he welcomed Mr. Huycke.

"Mr. Huycke is currently a member of the City of Markham's Legislative Services Division," said Mr. Mar. "Among other roles, he is successfully involved with the development and provision of Markham's public, legislative and records services."

The newcomer to Town Hall was in attendance April 8 as Council signed off on his appointment and while watching from the public gallery, he was quickly got up to speed on Aurora's Council dynamics.

"I would like to welcome our new Clerk to our Council chamber and to the Town of Aurora," said Councillor Wendy Gaertner at the time, before going on to question the appointment process. "It has always been, in the past, and as far as I can remember, that members of Council were involved in the selection of the directors and, in this case, the Clerk."

Responding to questions as to why this wasn't the case now, Mr. Mar said the difference now lies in the fact the role of Clerk is now a managerial position who reports directly to Mr. Mar.

"It would set an awkward precedent if every manager in Town was somehow subject and open to being interviewed by Council," he said.

Mr. Mar added the interview process was taken on by himself, as well as the Town's Human Resources Manager and, in the final round, overseen by himself and CAO Neil Garbe, with Mayor Geoffrey Dawe sitting in on the interviews but leaving the final decision up to the two directors.

Councillor Gaertner, however, said that shouldn't be the case as the Clerk, even if he or she is no longer a director, is still a statutory position outlined by the Province.

"The Clerk has a direct reporting line to Council," she said. "Council has the authority to fire a Clerk and I believe this is a decision Council should have been involved in and I am actually quite upset we were not."

Also questioning the office of Town Clerk, but from a different angle, was Councillor Evelyn Buck, whose motion asking for answers on just how much money Aurora would save from eliminating that director position, finally came up for discussion after weeks of delays.

"We had the Sunshine List of Salaries and it was noted the Clerk's salary was \$179,000, the Director's salary, and that figure doesn't strike a chord with me because the previous year his salary had been \$149,000 and I believe it was red lined, so I don't understand how it got to be \$179,000," said Councillor Buck.

A consultant's study on service levels, she said, indicated money could be saved by eliminating certain positions and programs.

?At the tail end of the report, the consultant took it upon himself to suggest that if there was any desire on Council to reduce the burden that we would eliminate a director's position,? she said. ?I always thought that was a very odd tail-end to a study and soon we had a recommendation that a director's position of all positions, one which would include a statutory officer, was eliminated. I would like and I believe the public are entitled to an explanation of how this particular position was chosen and what savings have been a result of that decision.?

By eliminating the position and merging the two departments, Aurora is expected to save an estimated \$100,000, said Mr. Mar.