

New committee will keep a sharp eye on Aurora's budgeting, finances

By Brock Weir

More eyes could soon be keeping track of Aurora's financial interests, following a decision by Council last week.

Councillors voted to restore Aurora's Finance Advisory Committee, which is tasked with providing advice to Council on capital planning fiscal responsibilities, and providing an avenue for advance input on the annual budget process.

A Finance Advisory Committee is not a new idea. Aurora once had one, and attempts to revive it in the last term of Council were unsuccessful. Last week's motion from Councillor Michael Thompson, however, did the trick. The next steps will be the development of terms of reference for the committee and recruitment of possible members.

"Advisory committees are set up to support the functions of the Town and Staff, and this is certainly one that would provide a lot of benefit to us on Council, as well as to staff around the table," said Councillor Thompson.

After talks with Town Staff, key areas on which Councillor Thompson said such a committee would have an immediate impact would be in continuing reviews of Aurora's service levels and, if changes are proposed, whether they are on the right track.

"Certainly whenever we entered into the budget conversation we always [discuss if] we're doing the right things and doing things right, and I think this advisory committee can support some of the initiatives we have with regards to the service level reviews [and other areas] of our capital budgeting forecasts."

Councillors John Abel and Sandra Humfryes also lent their voices in support of the restored committee.

"I am really excited about moving this forward," said Councillor Humfryes. "It is going to provide us with the interim reports that we need approaching budget [and] we're going to be a lot more informed and aware as things change. I think there will be less surprises and more familiarity, and it also allows us to be much more engaged in the process throughout the year, rather than at one big time, which is coming up for all of us."

The idea to re-establish the committee was carried over from the previous week's General Committee meeting, where Councillor Thompson told Council he was considering bringing this forward via a notice of motion. There, it had the support of Councillor Paul Pirri as well, although he had some concerns.

"If memory serves, the first terms of reference that was brought forward made sense to a great deal of people around the table," said Councillor Pirri. "Where the conversation broke down was around membership. Some people believed we [Councillors] need to all be around the table, but a committee works best and most efficiently when there are only a few members.

"I personally would feel very comfortable just having those [original] terms of reference come back to us so as to set up one as a Council and we look at it as a Council. Personally, that makes sense to me."