

New fire hall will take 13 years to pay off: Treasurer

By Brock Weir

The Central York Fire Services is planning to make its new fire hall on the southwest quadrant of Bayview and St. John's Sideroad its flagship, but moving forward full speed on the fifth fire station serving Aurora and Newmarket hit a snag around the Council table last week.

As The Auroran reported last week, Aurora will be taking the lead on construction as it will be entirely within Aurora ? just behind the new Sterne Acura dealership on Earl Stewart Drive.

Costs for the land and design are currently pegged at \$520,000, for an estimated final bill of \$3.66 million, 40.6 per cent of which will be financed by Aurora largely through development charges.

?In addition to the construction, the Fire Services DC will also be required to fund Aurora's share of the new fire apparatus and bunker gear for the new crew to be located at this hall for a combined estimate of an additional \$300,000,? said Treasurer Dan Elliott in his report to Council last week.

?Development Charges on hand are insufficient for the project. Following the purchase of the land, the Town's fire DC balance is \$505,700 as at October 31, 2016. If all funding was required for this project immediately, the DC reserve would be overdrawn in the amount of \$3,400,900. Fire DCs amount to \$590 per single and semi-detached residential unit today and accordingly amounts to approximately 6,000 units. It will take more than 10 years of future development to fully pay for this new facility.?

Questioning around the Council table, however, revealed this number is closer to 13 years ? 12.8 years to be precise.

This spurred some reservations around the Council table, particularly from Councillors Wendy Gaertner and Jeff Thom. Rather than approving both the design and construction phase at last week's meeting, as staff recommended, Councillor Gaertner put forward an alternative, which was accepted by Council: approving just the funding for the design phase, requiring the construction component to be subject of a further report and debate.

Among Council's concerns were ongoing questions over the continuing flow of development charges as Aurora reaches closer and closer to build out.

?There is clearly some tailing off of development over the short term and then moving into a long-term horizon,? said Mr. Elliott, responding to these questions. ?Yes, we have this build-out goal of 70-odd thousand people as our population and that is this planning horizon. In another 10 years, I am certain this number is going to be different.

?By giving us the funding we can go to design and I expect in the next cycle, which is now the end of March, I would be able to come back with a detailed report and accounting on how I came to 12.8 years.?

?I think we have a pretty good handle on what is going to happen in the next 10 years because we know the DCs are going to build out and we know that we're going to have infill and intensification,? said Councillor Gaertner. ?I think we have a good handle [on that] and part of my issue is the financial implications section [of the report] and the numbers were only given for the singles and the semis, not for the condos and the row(houses) and there is no component for the DCs on industrial, commercial and institutional [development]. Maybe it all does work out, but I can't tell that from this report. In this report, it seems to me we're only going to be raising half the money in 10 years.?