

New fire station could lead to better emergency response times

By Brock Weir

As Councillors from Aurora and Newmarket began talks this week on the 2015 budget for the Central York Fire Services, they faced how to address the needs of two growing communities.

As The Auroran reported last week, Town Hall anticipated a proposed municipal tax increase of 4.96 per cent at first blush. A larger than expected budget forecast from the Central York Fire Services (CYFS), the fire department serving both Aurora and Newmarket, however, pushed this forecast up to a 6.1 per cent tax hike.

Although Council expects this number to go down as budget talks continue, they will have to deal with the demands of two rapidly growing communities.

Members of the Joint Council Committee, the group of Aurora and Newmarket Councillors governing the CYFS, had an appetiser of demands to come last month as consultants rolled out recommendations for their updated fire master plan. Among the chief recommendations for the community in the year ahead were increased education and prevention programs for both communities, and a proposed new fire station in the north end of Aurora that could better assist already existing stations.

‘There is a lot of growth happening,’ said Steve Thurlow, a consultant leading the new master plan. ‘It is not just growing out, but it is growing together and becoming that one community.’

Three strategic priorities were identified for Councillors to consider as part of their revised master plan, the first being what is described as ‘comprehensive community risk assessment’ to get a handle on existing and projected risks.

‘We want to be able to get ahead of the population changes and growth changes and we can do that through this,’ said Mr. Thurlow.

Citing education and prevention as the first lines of defence, this came down as the second priority. Chief among these tasks is ensuring each home in Aurora and Newmarket has working smoke detectors. That, he said, could be a tall order.

‘It has taken us a long, long time to change human behaviour to wear seatbelts,’ he said. ‘It has taken generations and we need to get to the same point with smoke alarms that you won’t go to bed until you know the smoke detector is working on every level.’

Making this a reality, however, would require the need for two additional staff members, one dedicated for education, as well as a second fire inspector.

A further fire station is also proposed for the north end of Aurora – the vicinity of Yonge Street and St. John’s Sideroad is said to be ideal – to assist existing stations. If that comes to pass in the year ahead, it would be more than just a fire station, but also a training centre – and one which would require hiring 20 additional firefighters, said Mr. Thurlow.

‘It would be very difficult to use current resources to staff that station,’ he said. ‘By locating a station somewhere within the centre of that area, not only will it improve our initial response capabilities for future growth, but it is also going to provide a tremendous support on the depth of response for the entire community. Being strategically located in the middle, it can help significantly with some of the other stations.’

‘It is going to take some consideration because everybody knows how hard it is to find a piece of property in this community and to put a training centre there is going to need a large piece of property.’