

Noise bylaws could be tightened up to reflect 'lifestyles'?

By Brock Weir

Have you been part of Aurora's "mass civil disobedience"?

If so, changes at Town Hall could mean you'll no longer have to face the music.

Councillors approved a motion last week to review and revise bylaws prohibiting music from outdoor speakers in many circumstances in Aurora. In his motion, Councillor John Abel underscored bylaws barring music from playing on exterior outdoor speakers, while music projected outdoors from indoor speakers does not fall under similar restrictions.

A revision, he added, would 'better reflect the modern lifestyles of residents of our Town.'

His motion was spurred by a delegation to Council last month from resident Tom Beck. At the time, Mr. Beck told Council he had received a write up from a municipal bylaw officer for playing music on outdoor speakers. He returned this week in support of the motion.

'It came to my attention in June that this bylaw existed when I had a violation,' he said. 'I have been here half my life and never even knew about it. I have been talking to a lot of people and nobody knew about [it either]. It is a lifestyle that we have come to enjoy, having a little bit of music going. The recommendation given to me was I should stick speakers in my windows, which would be somewhat more offensive than the little speakers I have.'

Techa van Leewen, Aurora's Director of Bylaw Services, told Council that the Town's noise bylaws do prohibit certain noises and activities at certain parts of the day. Amplified music, if it is audible to surrounding premises, falls under this ban, she added, but it is permitted if it is not audible to other homes and buildings, she added.

'Noise travels in peculiar ways and is very subjective, as is music,' she said. 'If we were to amend the bylaw to permit outdoor playing of music being audible to premises other than where it is originating, we may see an increase in complaints and there may be an impact on staff: how do you regulate the types of music, how loud it is being played, and those kinds of things.'

For Councillor Evelyn Buck, the fact that these things can be subjective highlights a bigger problem. Depending on the day, the weather, and other conditions, noise can travel differently.

'How do you enforce such a bylaw?' she asked. 'I am wondering if we should have it at all. The more I hear, the more I think this bylaw is problematic and it should be taken off the books altogether.'

Other Councillors, however, saw merit in keeping it 'but to better reflect reality.'

'I was quite shocked to hear this was on the books and I completely agree with the motion to revisit it,' said Councillor John Gallo. 'You would be surprised by the number of people contravening this bylaw.'

Speaking to the number of people indeed contravening it, Councillor Abel said, with a laugh that revising the bylaw 'might' mitigate the large civil disobedience going on in our Town.'

'With our lifestyle in Aurora, there are lots of opportunities to sit in your backyard and enjoy some music,' he said.

Other Councillors, however, were more cautious in moving forward. Councillor Wendy Gaertner, for instance, said she was in favour of sending the bylaw back to staff for review, but wanted further information on what other municipalities were doing. Councillor Chris Ballard expressed a similar view.

?I don't necessarily want to send this back to staff for a really in-depth report because I think we will find that every municipality is doing this kind of thing,? he said.