

Opportunities available for Aurorans to have say on Town's future

By Brock Weir

If you have ever wanted to take an active role in helping shape the future of Aurora, but might not want to throw your hat into a municipal election, now is your chance.

The search is now on for citizens to join Aurora's advisory committees.

Applications are being accepted through Friday, January 23, for residents looking to participate on the Town's Environmental, Economic, Heritage, Parks and Recreation, and Trails and Active Transportation Advisory Committees.

Membership is open to all residents or landowners within Aurora and applicants will be considered and appointed by Council.

Council approved the re-establishment of these advisory committees last month, following discussions over composition and frequency of the meetings. They concluded meetings of these "discretionary" committees be held every other month, leaving it in the hands of each committee's chairperson to decide if additional meetings need to be called.

"I like the start of this because it allows committee members to set up the terms of when they would like to meet," said Councillor Sandra Humfryes, supporting an amendment put on the floor from Councillor Paul Pirri to change the frequency of meetings from monthly to bi-monthly.

While the amendment passed, some Councillors expressed a degree of concern that citizens signing up for bi-monthly meetings might get cold feet if they were meeting more frequently than what they originally signed up for.

"If people put their names forward [on the basis that it is] bi-monthly and then it starts to change to a monthly aspect, they might be overwhelmed by that aspect and they might end up dropping out," said Councillor Tom Mrakas. "I think that is a real possibility."

Councillor Jeff Thom said this needs to be clear in each committee's terms of reference, but Councillor Pirri said he did not see this as a significant issue.

"It is a valid point, but on the committee I sat on last term, individuals dropped off because they felt they weren't being utilized because some of the meetings were not as intense as others. I see both sides of the equation, but I think it makes most sense to come at it from opposite ends."

Added Councillor Harold Kim: "Have it scheduled for bi-monthly [meetings] but let people know there is a chance it could be monthly and have tentative dates set out so people know to have that scheduled in their calendars."

There will also be further opportunities for more residents to have their say in accessibility issues facing Aurora.

Council gave the green light to a request put forward by Councillor Wendy Gaertner and supported by Councillor John Abel to boost the membership of Aurora's Accessibility Advisory Committee "a committee required to be reinstated under provincial legislation" from five members to seven.

For mandatory committees such as this, rules are set out as to their composition and mandate but for Councillor Gaertner, the terms of reference for the Accessibility Advisory Committee do not go far enough. In the last term of Council, it was a group comprised of one Councillor and four citizen members who were stakeholders in issues of accessibility.

According to the Councillors, the group should be expanded because it was among the smallest in York Region.

?The committee of five members is a difficult number to work with because apart from the Councillor and citizen members, everybody else has accessibility issues and often people are not able to come and that gives us an issue of quorum,? said Councillor Gaertner. ?I would like to suggest that we take this to seven members, as we do the other committees, and that gives us a better chance to get a better turnout in winter weather, in sickness, etc.?

During the last term of Council, a number of questions were raised at the table over recommendations coming to Council directly from committee on important initiatives and developments, oftentimes without a summary of the arguments made at the committee level.

Once the committees are re-established for this term, Mr. Huycke is introducing a new method of reporting where decisions and recommendations made by the Committee to Council would come to Council as minutes, with summaries of the arguments made to underscore their role in ?providing advice? to Council.