

People should be able to support trails through donations: advocates

By Brock Weir

Residents should be able to donate their own money to help secure, preserve and maintain trails in Aurora they hold close to their heart, say advocates.

It is not a new concept, and one which has been floated at Town Hall several times in the past, but members of Aurora's Trails and Active Transportation Advisory Committee and members of Council remain at odds on how such a donation account can be established.

The issue was brought forward once again to Councillors at last week's General Committee meeting when they received a recommendation from the Trails Committee to put one in place.

They recommended that Council establish the account to receive public donations for trails infrastructure, prepare all the necessary paperwork ? including donor information ? as early as this summer.

By the time that recommendation got to Council, the pitfalls of establishing such an account were once again sounded by Town Treasurer Dan Elliott.

?This direction actually arose last summer and I suppose in some ways I pre-empted the committee discussions by bringing a report back to Council,? he said. ?My concerns remain that there needs to be thorough control of the marketing and development of the donation campaign, its purposes and who it is that is actually going to be making such solicitations.

?I had no trouble with establishing a donation account to capture donations that are made for trails, however?if you have another arm of the organization reaching out and soliciting additional donations for trails, to me it becomes a little more conflicting to residents.?

Saying he did not hear a ?ringing endorsement? from Mr. Elliott, Councillor Thompson said he could not vote in favour of the recommendation without it. Councillor Paul Pirri said he too had misgivings about the recommendation because establishing the fund before clear rules and parameters are determined on its governance was premature.

?It is not our function to solicit donations for a fund,? said Councillor Evelyn Buck. ?We are tax collectors and the two cannot be compatible with one another.?

Councillor Chris Ballard questioned, however, whether the Town can issue tax receipts for the donations it takes in on behalf of the Aurora Community Arboretum. Mr. Elliott said the Town did indeed issue such receipts for donations made to contribute to the green space, but while Councillor Pirri argued there was a significant difference between taking in donations on behalf of a third party versus donations for a municipal initiative such as trails, others suggested establishing a third party might be the route to go.

?Maybe the proper step is a Friends of the Aurora Trails System,? said Councillor Thompson. ?You see it sometimes with libraries and museums and maybe that is the appropriate steps.?

Added Councillor Ballard, ?Perhaps what we should do is take this one back and refer it to the Trails Committee and invite the director to sit down with them so that the Committee can get a better understanding of what the concerns are.

?Maybe it does call for the establishment of a third party that is in line with the Town in as much a way as the Arboretum is. I would hate just to kill this [idea] tonight.?