

Plans for new fire station at Bayview and St. John's move forward

By Brock Weir

A new fire station on the north end of Town, strategically located to better response times in both Aurora and Newmarket, cleared a significant hurdle last week.

Council approved designs for the \$11 million facility last Tuesday night after the designs and budget cleared the Committee level the previous week.

Aurora's portion of the bill, which will be funded by development charges set aside for fire services, clocks in at \$3.6 million, while Newmarket will take on \$5.32 million. A further \$2.1 million will be funded by the Central York Fire Services itself.

Preliminary designs were greenlit back in November and, since that time, officials from both municipalities, as well as Fire Chief Ian Laing, have been working to refine the concept.

Modifications, according to Operations Director Al Downey, have been made to 'improve efficiency and operational effectiveness of the facility' while maintaining budget.

'The Town of Aurora will be supporting this project with specialized internal project management resources as we undertake corporately to enrich our project management disciplines to major projects,' said Mr. Downey, who will be overseeing the project.

'A specialized internal resource has been hired to assist with this and is being funded by a change to each affected project internally.'

Some Councillors, however, raised their eyebrows over the fact an external project manager would not be appointed to steer the build after the controversies that arose during the construction of Aurora's Joint Operations Centre.

'We're not hiring a manager for this project per se; we're hiring additional project management expertise to keep us in tune with good project management techniques and philosophies,' said CAO Doug Nadorozny, responding to questions from Councillor Michael Thompson. 'The project will be managed through Mr. Downey.'

Other questions were raised on the funding model, particularly the use of Development Charges (DCs), fees paid by developers coming into a community to account for future growth, to pay off Aurora's share of the facility costs.

'The last time this came to Council, we had an outline of how long it would take us to pay for this and it was based on the residential DCs,' said Councillor Wendy Gaertner, adding industrial, commercial and institutional development charges should be included in the equation. 'My concern at the time was we were talking about a 20-year payback, but I don't think our development is going to be very robust over the next year or two. My concern is this is going to take a long time to pay this back based on the estimate of the DCs and I am not sure that is viable.'

Town Treasurer Dan Elliott, on the other hand, said the report on only using residential DCs to fund this project was a 'worst case scenario.' Industrial, commercial and institutional (ICI) DCs contribute to the fire fund and will go towards the new fire hall.

'ICI is very difficult to predict when and how consistently it will occur over time, so I have left it out of the analysis,' he said.

Councillor Gaertner also had a critique over the design of the building itself.

Now being built near the northwest corner of Earl Stewart Drive and St. John's Sideroad, just behind the Sterne Acura dealership, the designs heavily feature glass elements, an element the Councillor questioned.

'When we were shown the design of this building, I made a comment that there was a lot of use of glass and that would be very energy inefficient,' she said. 'The architect said he hadn't thought of that. In this age of wanting to be very energy efficient, do you know if the design was modified in any way to accommodate the use of less glass?'

Replied Mr. Downey, 'The design has not dramatically changed from its original concept that has been presented to Council. Most of the changes have been made internally, but the exterior of the building remains much as Council has seen previously.'

This, said Councillor Gaertner, was not in keeping with the Town's intent for a Community Energy Plan.

'I think we need to set an example and I would appreciate if my comment is taken by Mr. Downey to the appropriate person to look at it. The other thing is it is going to cost us more money to run.'

In the end, however, Council supported the design and, indeed, the need for a new fire hall that essentially straddles the border of the two municipalities.

'This is an excellent example of money that we spend that improves the quality of lives for our residents. This is a safety and a great support long-term and I am really pleased to see this coming forward,' said Councillor John Abel.