

Policy on re-naming Town facilities should be stronger, says Councillor

The selling of naming rights to municipal facilities and parks has long been a way for towns and cities to generate funds, but clearer guidelines need to be in place should a re-naming be necessary.

This was the view shared by local lawmakers last week as the Town of Aurora looks to adopt a revised Naming Rights Policy.

The new policy recommends Aurora continue with its established policies of naming municipal assets "after significant geographical, neighbourhood and historic features"; to recognize "on an exceptional basis" significant contributions made by organizations and individuals to public life, and the process by which these individuals and organizations are evaluated.

It also delineates a process should a facility be re-named for any reason, including that the public be kept in the loop on potential changes and the reason behind it, and that family members of those honoured, "or individuals that can be identified" be given notice.

"Generally, changing the name of an existing asset is not encouraged. However, if it is deemed appropriate to change the name, the renaming process shall be identical to the naming process and require Town Council as the final authority for approving the proposed municipal asset name," said John Firman, Manager of Business Support, in a report to Council. "However, the renaming of an existing commemoration shall be subject to a minimum of 60-day public consultation period. If an application is intended to displace an existing commemorative name, before a renaming application is accepted, the nominator must have written permission from the family or next of kin of the person that is to be displaced. Where a renaming has been initiated because of a development proposal, the proponent may be required to resolve any opposition that may exist to the renaming, prior to the presentation of a report to Council."

But this notification process raised the eyebrows of Ward 6 Councillor Harold Kim.

The naming of parks, buildings and other public facilities, he said, "help shape our community identity and even our values" while "building pride in where we live and work."

"It's important we get this policy right," he said, adding he did not believe the Town should need permission to rename an asset if the reasons to do so are strong "or if the individual in question had been found to have done something 'abhorrent.'"

"This is Town property and, as such, the Council of the day and the residents have the right to make whatever changes it needs to make without permission of the displaced named person's family or next of kin."

Ward 4 Councillor Michael Thompson agreed that the termination policies need to be beefed up, while Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland questioned whether, in the case of naming rights being purchased by an individual or company, the money exchanged for the honour would have to be returned if the name was removed for any reason.

Firman said while there is an "out clause" in some areas for things such as this, it was beyond the scope of the specific policy before Council.

A more tentative approach, however, came from Ward 3 Councillor Wendy Gaertner, who said if this or previous Councils named something after an individual or family, it would be "disrespectful" to take that away.

"There would have to be a reason for it at the time [and] I am assuming it was a good reason to honour somebody," she said. "[The policy] says, 'if it was deemed appropriate to change the name,' [but] what would be appropriate? Why would we change the name?"

Firman said it wasn't his "place" to give examples as that would be a discussion for Council.

?The reason it is in the policy is to at least provide some sort of parameters,? he said. ?At any point in time, whether it is policy or not, the Council of the day always has the authority to make that kind of change.?

As discussion continued, Councillor Kim asked for further details to be drafted before the policy comes up for ratification by Council at the end of the month.

?A named individual can be ? and I am not going to give out an example ? it could be anything abhorrent to society. You just don't want to be stuck with having no options because it is in our policy after the fact. It is more just to prepare to have options. It's not to take away or remove any names for no reason; there would have to be something pretty horrendous for that to happen. Again, it would be a Council discussion; it shouldn't be just automatic.?

By Brock Weir