

Power temporarily killed on LED streetlight switchover plan

By Brock Weir

Councillors voted to hold off on a \$3 million plan to convert all of Aurora's streetlights to LED systems last week, over uncertainty the Town would be getting their best buck from the switch-out.

LED or Light Emitting Diode lights are more energy efficient and the thought behind the plan is Aurora would be able to, in the end, reduce energy consumption and save some money. But a recommendation from staff to turn over the conversion to a third party company which would, in turn, get a piece of the money saved, caused Councillors to question whether the Town would ultimately realise more money if they did the conversions themselves.

"I think far and away the best option is to do it in-house," said Councillor Paul Pirri. "It is the most cost-efficient method and it will bring the most revenue. We know energy rates are going to be going up and so, ultimately, I would rather maximize that potential than minimize it by going through a third party."

From Councillor Pirri's perspective, it might take more effort on the part of Town Staff, but the benefits of doing so outweighed the costs, he said.

This was a view shared by Councillor Michael Thompson who said there was not enough data presented to Council to support going forward with a third party, potentially running the cost of losing between \$75,000 and \$100,000 savings that could be realised from the LED conversion.

"I would have really liked to have seen some preliminary data to really outline the differences between the three options in terms of what we would be giving up in going with one or the other third party groups," said Councillor Thompson. "It is a significant amount of dollars -- \$300,000 a year, based on a 10 year horizon. There needs to be more data to say this is definitely the better route to go."

According to Ilmar Simanovskis, Aurora's Director of Infrastructure and Environmental Services, taking on a third party to undertake conversion would minimize risk that would be undertaken by the Town, as well as take advantage of the expertise of a company that makes such conversions their business. In his view, working with such a company could help Aurora get better market rates.

"By paying them to advise us, we most likely will save money because of their advice, they are experts in this field, and they know everything that is going on out there?" asked Councillor Wendy Gaertner, to which Mr. Simanovskis replied in the affirmative.

While many Council members were gun-shy about going forward with the conversion right now, one thing they did agree on was that LED conversion was ultimately in the cards. How to get there, however, is a different story.

"I would love to move this project in principle," said Councillor John Abel. "I believe reducing our energy cost is a great investment. I believe there are going to be all kinds of pressures going forward, especially since it has been announced by the Provincial Government that electricity costs are going to be going up 45 per cent in the next five years. I think it is important that we move forward. At the same time, I can see where I would want a little bit more data and costs."

Councillor Evelyn Buck said she agreed there are benefits to converting Aurora's street lights to LED lights, but what she objected to was converting every street light all in one go when most existing lights are in good working order.

"I think there are more practical ways to go about changing over to LED lighting in the Town and there are good reasons to do it in stages," she said. "For one, we change the lights and we have a regular light maintenance program every year, so every year there are lights that have to be replaced. They can be replaced by LED lighting rather than the current type. The enormity of doing this

Town-wide isn't just about taking out lighting that is functioning, it is also about disposing of it. The idea of taking a [functioning light] out and throwing it away just doesn't appeal to me in the least, unless we are doing it in small bites.?